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THE BLUE STREAK

BY JACK HINES

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BUT GREY CLOUD WAS A DIFFERENT PROPOSITION FROM THE ASSASSINS' EARLIER VICTIMS [*See page* 173]

THE BLUE STREAK

BY

JACK HINES

AUTHOR OF

SEEGAR AND CIGAREET, ETC.

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TO

HENRY BREVOORT KANE

TO SIGNALIZE OUR FRIENDSHIP

AND

MRS. WILLIAM SAKÉE HOFSTRA

TO PERPETUATE HER LOVE FOR HOMELESS
AND HELPLESS DOGS

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THE BLUE STREAK

I

THE BLUE STREAK

THERE was something abroad in the night that had me fidgeting and fitfully restless. When it first set me bolt upright in my bunk I remember that I had a fleeting thought of night birds dipping and swirling about in the intense darkness outside. Then I thought of the weird bird of the North that the Immachuck bucks call the "hoo-hoo." That's what it was; an Arctic owl was beating up against the dried intestine window covering. In the black of the unbarked spruce of which the cabin was built this skin panel appeared like a pale face against which the owl was hurling himself and filling me with fear. Then I switched from the owl, to a little inquisitive, nosey ermine. Probably one of these white hunters was foraging

about the camp attracted to it by the far reaching smell of high ptarmigan. Fretting along this line I dropped into dreamland again as the "blue pigeon" drops to the bed of the sea.

It seemed but a few seconds after—more than likely it was a good half hour—that I found myself standing at my bunk-side and crying for my cabin mate and slavey Kutaro.

"Kutaro! O Kutaro! Up! Up! The dogs!" I yelled to the Selawick; groping about in the darkness, dull with sleep and the skin running in wavelets over my back like an icy tickler. The Indian's bunk was empty; already he had slipped from the folds of his lynx robe and was out in snow kennels with never a sound to me.

I could hear them straining and tugging at their chains frantically screeching as if some weird fiend had cast its spell over them. I was considerably mystified because ordinarily they were not of the breed to show fear in any circumstance. They were all, with the exception of "Whitey," who came of the Siberian Samoyedes, true bred descendants of the grey timber wolf; the great Alaska sire of the malamute trail dogs. Untiring servants of man and the glorified salva-

tion of many, who have bared their teeth at the pitiless gods of the Arctic.

Yet here they were crying out in intense fear. I caught Kutaro's voice above the discordant wailing; "Towah, towah, towatin" (stop it) ah-kar 'See-gar' 'Whiner,' towatin!" he commanded. Cigar was my big lead dog, Whiner and Brownie were the swing-hitch team. Finally the boy had them passive and I could hear him going to each of them speaking soothingly his native Selawick, the mellifluous tongue of a tribe of ancient, still people, which charmed these wild dogs as sweet music lulls the hating soul.

Then I heard the crunch of his footfall as he passed to where we had "Acushla" barricaded. The riotous mating imp was alive in her blood. We had her securely imprisoned against the pack. Acushla was my great pet of pets; the wisest wildest possession I could claim. Since cub-dom she had been to me what no human being—it seems now—can ever be, the breathing symbol of the word "faith." However insidiously and persistently her weaknesses were assailed, however subtle and alluring the temptation, still could she see no master but me. I recall the nineteen-one spring day when I traded for her, with a big

bronzed Tubucktulick Indian, who had but the day before pilfered her from a brood of snapping mischievous wolf cubs, and in the crook of his arm he had brought her to me over thirty miles of glare ice trail.

It-cher-uck smiled an unmistakable "it is well" when he saw the way the pup and I hit it off from the moment she was nested in my arms. Here was compensation for his thirty-mile pilgrimage, thought he.

Day after day I watched the blazing fire of her eye yield to a look of kindly intelligence, saw the effect of sealskin breast-plate as it broadened her shoulders in servitude to me, her lord. And then came her first litter of young; she seemed enveloped in an ecstasy of unutterable rapture.

"Ah-kar Oon-nah! Ah-kar Oon-nah!" Kutaro had broken into the cabin chanting this dread lament of the Selawicks. But once before I had heard it from the boy; when Ock-too-dahk-ee-ock-tuck (big moon) his brother, had brought the tidings from the fighting fields of the Shungnak that Kugaro their father and chief of the Selawicks had passed to the peace of the gods.

I bade him speak the words that sprang from

me before he could; "Acushla's gone!—Oong," he affirmed.

The uprights, sills and beams of Acushla's house we had built of sturdy seasoned birch, and over the entire structure we had lashed a beluga skin; tougher even than walrus hide. A great strip of this pelt had been torn away, and unmistakably plain at the incision places were the lance-like tusk marks of some huge jawed beast.

Abrasions and scratchings were to be seen on the *inner* side of the hide, which to me were patent evidences that rather than virtuously combative, Acushla had been a willing victim in the rapacious abduction. I secretly felt a great admiration for whatever monarch of the wild that could so come into the camp of his eternal enemy and carry off the flower of his wolf-dog pack. Losing Acushla made of me the prey of an inconsolable grief; excepting Cigar and Whitey, she had whelped every dog in my crack string and had become in the years of our association so integrally morticed in the nomadic scheme of my existence that I now felt as though some vital part of my life had left me.

Again I reverted to her when in the glory of her first litter some years before, the six of them were

scampering little rascals rolling over her and cutting their cub-wolfish capers. I saw her with the brood closely gathered about her, all at the edge of a but recently ice-crusted overflow. Under the sixteenth or eighth inch of glare ice could be seen the coursing of the pure fresh water. With her paw she struck the ice a trip-hammer-like blow and then lightly back-stepped as the released draught came about her toes. Had she stood in the water for even a fraction of a minute the danger of freezing to the ice was great, so she avoided it deftly at the same time nosing the little ones away too.

It perplexed me considerably to note that in the repetition of this process she apparently did not care to drink; but presently I was enlightened, when I saw Acushla select one of the cubs—Whiner it was—her heart's favorite, and urge him to follow her example. He could not quite make it with the stroke of one paw so he deliberately rose on his hind feet and came down kerplunk with the full force of his forequarters. Then Whiner took a drink as did the rest of the bunch and all bounded back without a damp paw-cushion; believe me, 'twas neat.

Whilst I stood in the piercing stillness, rapt in reverie which brought to mind the days of Acushla's juvenescence, Kutaro with a flaming seal-oil flambeau was active solving the puzzle pictured by countless tracks and cross tracks in the snow. Kutaro's sense of intuition was a marvellous thing; he could take the trail with the deliberate scenting persistence of a blood hound. When he came to me I could see that the labyrinth of spoors had retained from him not even the slightest element of mystery. He had read the signs and had determined upon a course of action and I had had experience enough with him to give him his head in all matters appertaining to woodcraft and the conquest of distance.

"Well, Kutaro; what do you make of it?"

"Oo-noo-ahk-ko, chase 'em. Ah-kar him big wolf!"

"Why not go after them now?" I was impatient to be off in pursuit.

"Makes all the same," he replied, "I know where go." Then with his thumb laid across palm and cutting the air as a dolphin dips and rises, he indicated the direction to the head of the river upon a branch of which we were now cabined. He then came off the first tack at an acute angle

which would take us directly into the rangy divide of the high Sawtooth.

As if to prove that the Indian had accurately fixed his course we heard a faint, high pitched, almost laughing call from the recesses of the river's head waters. The dogs heard it too and immediately their fears and sorrows rose in mournful cries to the infinite expanses of the night.

At the close of the following day we made camp on the fork, up which we were to trail to Trinity Pass, the gateway to the most dreaded and impenetrable fastness of the Arctic.

In our equipment we carried what is known to the Alaskan dog-puncher as a trailer—a supple, racy birch sleigh—made entirely of seasoned birch, runners and all, and where not keyed and morticed, was lashed with the stripped skin rope of Ogrook hide. Kutaro had outfitted this craft as a thing apart from the big basket trail sleigh. Into it he had stowed every conceivable weapon and trapping device known to the native hunter.

I had taught the boy the humane uses of chloroform in despatching the living spoils of his traps and a can of this drug with cotton to apply it made part of the outfit. He had also provided a

whale-bone trap-net; this contrivance, so flexible and yielding to a certain point—then adamant and certain as death.

Early in the day we had lost all trace of the claw tracks which marked the trail of the fugitive pair. However to Kutaro they were apparently of no use for he commanded Cigar ahead as though the quarry were always in sight.

When I asked him what it was that made him so sure of himself he replied, "Last year I catch 'em lynx, other side, see same tracks! Him lone wolf. Big one! Stop there pee-nye-choo-nitt ah-poon" (three snows).

Noon of the next day we made the base of Trinity on the shoulder of the pass; sheer and precipitous she reared her tricrest, glaring white and tusk-like, against the deep azure of the skies. Down the slope of the other side plunged the team and as the edge of the timber belt drew near old Cigar caught the scent of untamed beasts. Immediately the timidity which seized him was felt by all the dogs and they voiced their apprehension by whimpering yelps filled with fear.

"Ano-cluck-tuck ee-mitt-nah, nar-goo-ruck." (The wind blows in this direction,—'tis well) was all that Kutaro said as we struck the dark of

the spruce. Here he adjusted a pair of long trail-breaking Yukon snowshoes, and selecting a Winchester .303, swung it across his arm and stalked ahead of the team, the picture of a relentless human tracking mechanism, the embodiment of primeval craftiness and determination.

At times I caught his profile, dilated nostrils, head thrown back—alert and eager for some pretonic sound, some infinitesimal evidence of the rendezvous of Rex wolf and Acushla. Suddenly he stopped and began a cautious back tracking to the sleigh, whispering to the dogs who swished their tails as if understanding that they were to remain absolutely quiet.

We had been taking it on the over-hang brink of a craggy gorge which cut a deep chasm in the side of the range. Kutaro pointed to the depths of this mammoth cave-like defile and looking upward toward the crest of the ridge said, "Wolf-Acooshala come this way—two sleeps. Now, down there!" He indicated a bee-line from the ridge-top to the bottom of the ravine.

"You come," he addressed me, "or me go alone. Take little sleigh. You stop here—team."

"I'm going too, Kutaro." At which he set to unhooking the dogs.

"I come," I thought, "well rather. This chase was as much meat and wine for me as it was for the Indian hunter."

Disengaging the trailer from the master sleigh he fitted the looped tug-strap across his chest and pulled the light craft along whilst I manned the handle bars. We stealthily skirted the tricky ledge which flanked the head of the gorge and when about a thousand paces from where he had anchored the team, Kutaro slipped the tug-strap from his shoulders and turning motioned to me with uplifted index the necessity for absolute silence.

Stepping to the trailer he took from it the trap-net, adjusted it to a long birch pole and arranged the sealskin draw thong on a reel which operated much as does a tarpon rig. Then I, taking a small bore Marlin, the can of chloroform and package of cotton, began with him the descent of the chasm.

A stiff breeze blowing up the gorge whipped a dust-like frost against our faces. This, however, notwithstanding the sharp sting of it, was greatly in our favour as it precluded the probability of our scent preceding us. Kutaro stalked on appar-

ently unmindful of my presence at his heels. Supreme self-confidence was evident to me in every movement of his powerful body. He gloated in the power he knew he possessed to take the old king alive.

With crouched shoulders and noiseless cushion tread we advanced and then there came to us a faint call—half bark and half yelp, it ascended to the brink of the gorge and lost itself in tremulous echoes. At this Kutaro slipped a steel jacketed cartridge into the chamber of his rifle and glanced at me with a smile on his face—I thought it was a smile; it was really the aboriginal grin which precedes or accompanies an act in which the Indian defies Fate incarnate.

Parting a dense patch of alder and willow brush, Kutaro discovered to my vision, some hundred yards distant, a flat-topped green-stone escarpment, upon which, in royal abandon, sat the finest timber wolf specimen I had ever seen at large or in captivity. Even from this distance, I could see the grandeur of his measurements, the brilliancy of his markings; my fear and apprehension were immediately lost at this first sight of the wolf; he seemed to me like old Cæsar, a

great wheeler I had once owned in the pioneer days of the Bonanza diggings.

I saw a great sire of the racing team dogs rather than a wild monarch of the ice-plains, and prayed that Kutaro would take him—*could* take him—alive.

He was contentedly submitting to the feminine caresses of my kennel queen Acushla. She coquettishly muzzled the old fellow, recklessly, passionately, all oblivious to the profane espionage of both Kutaro and myself who were shortly to end her spell of happiness.

Kutaro's eyes blazed with the lust-fire of conquest; he sighted deliberately and at the crack of the rifle old Rex collapsed on the ledge drilled clean and accurately. Acushla was consumed in a paroxysm of mystified concern and in spite of the wolf's infuriated snapping at her she persisted in lavishing upon him her solicitous advances.

At the crackling noise of our approach she bounded away with the swiftness born of sudden fright, heedless to my familiar call which she had known and obeyed since her puppy days. Old Rex heroically endeavoured to make after her but the steel nosed pellet had served its purpose

well; as far as concerned locomotion he was effectually incapacitated.

In a trice the Indian had cast the trap-net completely over him and as the draw thong began its mission, its prey's vicious snarling filled the canyon with agonizing yells. Rex was soon converted into an inert and helpless ball and when the spell of the drug had left his body, his wound had been cared for, and he beheld himself a chained captive in our camp at the mouth of Alder creek.

Kutaro was keen for the task of propitiating the beast to the advantages of his new world, eager to make it plain that he was to be the recipient of naught but kind attention, and nourishing food in abundance. Acushla also took a hand in conciliating Rex to his strange surroundings. He suffered only her to come within the radius of his chain; at first however he was disposed to repel her, and in many ways manifested that even she should keep away from him.

In due time we noticed that this sulkiness was gradually disappearing and at last he devoured his pan of cooked salmon and rice, which he had up to this time persistently abstained from touch-

ing, preferring raw fish and game which he tore and ate ravenously. One day Kutaro burst jubilantly upon me with the news that Rex had wagged his great bushy tail in response to the playful advances of the team dogs who had circled about him. Some days later I asked Kutaro if he thought it wise to turn Rex loose for a spell. "Nah-nak-ko (later on) I guess all right," he replied.

With the arrival of the Spring sunshine came a litter of cubs to Acushla.

Prizes each of them; four regular he-wolf dogs, there were, breathing watch-charm editions of their sire Rex, and one tiny ball of grey, fashioned by the Master Hand in the image of Acushla—her dam.

By this time, also, Rex had come to know that Kutaro and I were real friends of his, and that he really got quite a bit of pleasure out of having us play with him and show our love for him. He sensed a certain thrill of pleasure when the Indian would pat his head and run his fingers through his mane ruff and along the superb ridge of his spine. In this respect he was much like his offspring, the Alaska trail dog. Wild sire, like his domesticated descendant, loved to be petted. When finally

he was taken to Acushla's kennel and saw for the first time the glory of the happy she-dog with her young—his young, he evidenced his delight by affectionately nosing Acushla and sniffing with paternal elation each of the five little ones.

As the Arctic Spring merged into the brief open season spell, and in turn the warmth of Summer yielded to the grip of the eternal snows, a peculiar situation developed in the family of wolf dogs. As is so frequently exemplified in our own families, mother evinced an inseparable attachment for the four male progeny whilst father made it plain that life held no charm for him unless it could be shared by the beautiful she-cub, *his* daughter.

He permitted none of the team dogs to venture near her and little by little in their scampering and racing about the camp they increased the distance from the home kennels. However they always returned and thus put to rout the apprehension that Kutaro and I both felt, that they were secretly conspiring to bolt.

One day when they had reached the ridge of the left bank of the creek I called to them to come in and saw that Rex was not inclined to immediately obey as had become his custom. She

however bounded lightly to me and he, it seemed to me, trotted somewhat reluctantly after her.

"I should brand her," I thought as she nestled into my arms. "But how? I cannot cause her the pain of searing her adorable flesh, nor even marking the insensate lobe of her pointed ears." Then the idea of placing a bracelet upon her forepaw struck me, and before nightfall I had fashioned an armlet of beaten gold, virgin metal as I had taken it with my own hands from its ancient bed in the creek where we camped. This band I perforated with a punch-mark which proclaimed as mine all mining trapping, hunting and personal propaganda that bore it.

The circlet I welded, with the aid of Kutaro, allowing a reasonable amount of play, on the right forepaw of the dog, and I recall now, years after, the thrill of pleasure I felt when I saw the flash of the gold on the fleet foot of the beast as she cavorted in the rouged splendour of the dropping sun. I remember thinking at that time that the pure metal was but a fitting symbol of the sovereignty of her blood and the value of possessing her. The act of thus putting the mark on her, which all men of the Northland might instantly recognize, was but an evidence that I secretly felt

that she was about to desert me. True, I could have subjected Rex to the stake and chain confinement again, but then he would know that I had lost confidence in him, that I mistrusted him, and, if he really contemplated flight, the first freedom offered him would mean adios to us and with him would go, as I thought, the she-dog.

One evening I approached him and taking his magnificent head in my hands I said to him: "Rex old boy, are you fixing to beat it back to the Sawtooth? Are you? Answer me!" Just a swish of his tail was all I had to assure me that he was at least not inclined to be surly at my familiarity; I confess I had none too secure a poise of mind or body, when I ventured to lay a hand on him. Kutaro, though, seemed absolutely fearless of him.

Next day Rex and the wolf bitch had fled the home camp!

He had gone back to the weird lonesomeness of the Trinity. Who should censure him? Who could? Not I.

He preferred the majesty of the deep stillnesses of the woods, the wild grandeur of the gorgeous mountain-tops.

It was his choice; he had tasted of the pots of man's domain and had decided that the boundless, the infinite spaces, were *his*, to roam, to reign; and to them he flew—*also Acushla the Second!*

Have you seen the dog-shows of recent days? Have you filed in and out amongst the aristocrats of the breeds? The hounds, the airedales, the bulls, the sweet smelling setters, the imbecilic in-bred toys, champions of their class, however? The snappy, indifferent Asiatics, the imperious blue and red-coated Chows, the white Samoyedes from the Siberian and Yeniseisk plains, the racy Tartar wolf-hound, the comprehensive West Highland and Scots? The silken spaniels, beloved of the English queens? And have you marked that a wolfish, long-muzzled beast, with pointed ears, vari-coloured coat, inclined to greyish, with the eye of a falcon and the mien of an emperor, is commanding the interest and approval of faddish dog people?

This greyish beast is known as the "police dog."

He has super-doggish instincts and capabilities; is known to trail the slinking criminal, guided by a marvellous instinct which man can never fathom nor comprehend; is known to scale per-

pendicular barriers, to plunge into the dens of desperadoes and pounce upon a vile thug, hold him captive whilst his drivers follow him up with the steel bracelets and the protecting or avenging shooting irons.

These dogs are supposed to come from the cold provinces of Europe and Asia; this I am told; perhaps most of them do, but before you have finished what follows you will at least agree, I am reasonably sure, that *all* of the police dogs do not come from where they are supposed to come from.

Standing before the bench of a striking wildish looking creature of this breed—supposedly—I noticed that the panel which hung on the bench back-board bore this legend:

"BELGIAN POLICE DOG"

VERY DANGEROUS. PLEASE DO NOT TEASE.

MRS. REGINALD BLANC.

EXHIBITOR.

The name of the woman who had entered the dog in this class was in itself enough to ensure at least more than common interest in this particular exhibit. To the concerned and curious there

was nothing which might signally isolate the "Belgian Police Dog" in their comparisons or differentiations from any of her—it was a "her" —quintette of competitors.

To me however she folded back the curtain of many years. At sight of her, infinite distance was framed before my eyes in the limitations of her show bench. I saw the Arctic sun which at times I had seen for twenty-one days, glowing continuously, before he dipped like a blood red ruby below the Polar horizon. . . . It was the look in her eyes, her spine line with the ridge hair —a streak of black from the tip of the muzzle to the end of the tail, and the grey brush hair; also a familiar line in the conformation of the barrel coupling of the "Police Dog" which carried me from where I beheld her in the Garden Show at Twenty-sixth Street and Madison Avenue back over past years' ramifications in various and strange countries, to Alder Creek on the river which rose a tiny streamlet in the frontal prominence of Trinity Pass over the Sawtooth Range of Northern Alaska.

I saw old Rex at his romping, and a young sleek, grey thing of velvet, sporting and frolicking away, and ever away—from the home kennels—

and I saw the flash of virgin gold as she bounded back to me consumed in an ecstasy of happiness.

I suddenly became aware of a presence standing at my back. I could not see, but could feel rather, that some one was either intently watching me, or perhaps the dog. Later I determined that she was watching the two of us.

My hand had unconsciously found the neck fur of the Police dog and she in response lavished me with the caressings of her tongue. I held her head against me and crushed her as a man would crush his returned love to his breast. Her tail swished affectionately and I swear she spoke to me in almost human tone. She licked the brine which had found its way to my cheeks. Then a voice—her voice—at my back said, "How remarkable. Do you know Reina? She has never to my knowledge made up ever so slightly to any man!"

I felt a confusion which I am sure showed plainly in my face. Blood surged and beat about my temples.

Mrs. Blanc had addressed me! I had never seen her at such close range and to my mind all the writers of spectacular social columns who raved about her beauty and charm were com-

pletely vindicated. Their pictures were drawn from life, and not fancy, as I had always felt.

I hesitated to speak to her—but recognizing the sincerity and candour of her attitude toward me, I ventured—stammered—some incoherent response.

"Yes, she does seem to know me; she is so like a dog I owned once, some years ago. A wolf-dog that I bred and raised way up in the far North. It is almost too silly to expect that your Reina can be connected in any way with my Acushla the Second. But she does so look like her!"

"Reina" was on her hind feet, straining at her chain and reaching for me with her forepaws. I told her mistress the story of the nativity and rearing of Acushla the Second—and then of her escape with her sire Rex to the depths of the wilderness.

As I spoke Mrs. Blanc unbuttoned her glove and drew it slowly, significantly, from her hand, and I saw—*a golden bracelet which encircled her wrist!*

It was my band of virgin gold!

"This was on Reina's leg when she was brought to me," she said, holding her slender arm for my closer inspection. I am sure that I bruised her

beautiful arm, as I sought for my old Arctic brand mark. It was there all right. My surname initial; pierced by the arrow-head as Kutaro and I had punched it in the gold before welding it to the forearm of Acushla the Second.

It was not a time for words. Mrs. Reginald simply stood and gazed at her Reina—my Acushla—incredulity fighting with conviction. A thoroughbred woman the possessor of the purest bred Belgian Police Dog in America, in the world perhaps.

Rex had trotted into the camp of an Arctic exploration and hunting expedition. At his side frolicked Acushla the Second. They had come out of the wild, attracted by the familiar scent of the white man's habitat and where before they had had very kind and loving treatment. No fear was evident in their manner as they came up to the leader of the party. His first impulse was to kill; consternation supplanted this impulse when he understood that these beasts were but semi-wild.

When he returned to civilisation triumphant and exultant, he hastened to his waiting bride-elect. As a betrothal trophy he presented to her

the marvellous beast of grey with the band of gold about its leg.

Its wonderful intuition, its supreme instinct, its almost uncanny comprehension which developed under the guidance of an intelligent and understanding mistress have since become world famous. The obscurity which enveloped Reina's antecedents, the date and whereabouts of her birth have been now all cleared up. Although her kennel name still remains what she was rightly named, "Reina," the inscription in the official registration studbook proclaims her "Acushla II" by Rex out of Acushla I.

Rex majestically surveys the thousands of sight-seers who daily promenade and pause before his roomy cage in the beautiful Bronx gardens. In his eyes the wild-fire still burns undimmed. His soul is still—and shall be until the Great Father releases it from his magnificent body—back in the Sawtooth, beyond the tri-crest spires of Trinity Pass.

"SCAR-FACE"

"SCAR-FACE"

II

"SCAR-FACE"

IN Crag Hart—called "Scar-face" since the episode of this tale—could be encountered all the elemental units which entitled him to be rightfully termed the King of the Alaskan dog-punchers. He was the breathing, implacable, Indian-like embodiment of that sacred crew of Arctic spartans, tabulated and indexed in the big book of the United States custodians of postal matter, as the "out-post" mail carriers.

Hart's regular run lay between the Kaltag portage station on the lower Yukon, and the Northern terminal point of the three thousand mile mail route, at Nome. It was about the toughest, most deceitful stretch of three hundred miles in all the known Northland. It is yet, for that matter, for, until some profound geological change

occurs, or some distinct alterations of the North setting sea currents, is brought about, the Norton Sound winter trail shall always continue to be the most prolific of the Behring grave-yards.

Cross-cutting or skirting this treacherous bit of the trail in the ordinary routine of his duty, had sluiced away the soft youthlike contours of the trailman's face, and left in their place, gouged caverns and rock-like angles. These granite features were marked with a white gash that extended from the lobe of his left ear to the cleft of his chin, straight across the jaw.

He was the senior mail carrier in the Northland, a human spring of vitalised energy, set in a steel-knit frame. Hart on nearly each of his schedule trips, shook old grim Death by the hand and snarled defiance into his very face.

Now he was "summerin' with the dogs." With his team pack he was indolently resting the summer away. The open season was the trailsman's play spell. Drowsily leaning against the sun-soaked front of "Jourdan's Rest" Crag dreamed of the world beyond the southern horizon and wondered if ever he would break the link that kept him chained to this heartless man-breaking country, that had no use for any living thing ex-

cept to crush and grind it beneath a merciless heel.

At his feet, stretched in majestic repose, lay the inseparable companion of all his pleasures and pains—the famed wolf-bred leader malamute—"Brandy." The dog was enjoying his "Ock-tu-chin-ick-tuck"—the big sleep—to which he was justly entitled, after a winter of the most severe trail service he had as yet endured.

It is barely possible that the wolf leader was at the moment living over the event from which he had come forth knighted in the eyes of northern dogs and men. In his deep sleep he gave a far-away sort of wild call, and Crag—from the meditations of what awaited him across the seas—fell to stroking the livid crease along his chin-line.

Before his eyes swam an incessant parade of the summer season arrivals but recently deposited on the beach and all alive to make of the ninety 'days' daylight one long active period. It was to the dog-puncher a myriad-hued whirl which made him stroke more determinedly the still fresh scar on his face. As he did so he edged his foot out under the ribs of the dog so as to feel the deep breathing of the beast. He felt that Brandy, too, would like to know even though sleeping

that the one thing he adored above life almost, was right by his side—this master never withheld any evidences of affection from his dog.

The milling crowds seemed to spin before his eyes, they took shape in his reverie as the blinding whiteness of the snows in that fiercest blizzard of the year. The bright splotches of colour that flashed across his brain resolved to an interminable streak of fighting red. The crimson being the trail standards set by his government to hold the Sound voyagers to the true trail in thick going—that is if they didn't get lost between the stakes, and they set only one hundred yards apart.

"How did it all come and get by and over with so quickly?" Crag had really not quite retrieved his bearings—there was a mystic uncanniness that he could not rid himself of—*it was the upending of the ice* that staggered him now as he again tried to figure it all out. The flash of white, and the human cry from Brandy as his tusks missed Crag's drill parka and instead found a hold on his jaw—there was nothing indefinable about that! Ah, no. He—Crag—was here! He was breathing warm air. He saw the procession of his fellowmen. And why was that? The answer lay a pulsating, adoring servant at

his feet, taking his rest; not his pay—Brandy's pay was the commission laid before him for execution, at command of his master! "Don't take any chances on beating the break-up, Crag." These were the words that Corbersier, the river relay man, had spoken as he delivered the mail pouches to the open-trail man.

"I suppose you're going to tell me what to do on this playground of mine." Crag had returned this good-humoredly.

"I certainly got a chill or two when I left Nulato yesterday, Crag. The old river was growling and seemed like to me that she just wanted to buckle up and blast ice all over the Yukon valley. It just made me think of you and this stretch across the Sound that you have to make to-day. So you don't mind, old pal, if I sort of get it off my chest?"

Crag knew the kindliness and concern behind Corbersier's warning. Besides, he knew the significance of the Yukon signs. The trail spoke to these, her sons. Her language although mysterious was readily understood by the dog men and seldom if ever unheeded. Crag had had his message the day before while on the run from Chief Isaac's Point to Shaktolik and it came to

him with unmistakable meaning from his lead malamute—Brandy.

The dog, although holding true to the trail stakes, was ever for throwing his head toward the open sea and sniffing the sharp air as though it contained some menace from which he must fly. He called to the team dogs for further action. "Race with me, mates!" That's what it appeared he wanted to impress upon the string. "Run over me—if you can, dogs. I fear there'll be no trail here for our return trip to-morrow!"

A shroud-like mist hung heaving and billowing between the ice and the springtime sun. The tang of salt was in the air as Crag, riding the supple birch sleigh rail with his feet entwined in its supporting standards, gave Brandy the "Homeward Ho" command that sent him on like a projectile from the cannon's mouth. What lay before the dog held no terror for him. Once for a brief instant the sun broke through the vapour and showed itself a mocking fire ball—it was dull blood red and sinister—to Crag it appeared as a judgment fraught with calamity.

Its weird light was as abruptly withdrawn as it had appeared, leaving a smokelike shaft of

ghostly light where it had broken through the mist.

For three hours Brandy plunged on with his lead line strung out taut, infecting every dog in the team with his indomitable spirit. There were times that the guide posts were obliterated by the drifting snow but the leader's sense of direction never failed him. He caught up with and passed them with successive precision which made for Crag the task of driving the dogs a matter of minimum effort. When he gave Brandy his head, he—the dog—was the master mind of the mail outfit. What lay beyond the black shade that loomed before the lunging dogs was the thing that now caused Crag to shoot out his under jaw. The darkness of that screen was as a battle line for the trail kings, they threw themselves against it, eager to grapple with the worse it held for them.

Rather it threw itself against them. They were picked up as though the entire outfit were but a speck of chaff and whirled about in the vortex of a titanic ice tornado. Brandy squealed like a trapped wolf as he lurched blindly on, his ears were laid back close to his head, his tail was double screwed to his back so that his

team could see that no matter what the elements had on their firing line still he, the dog, was unafraid and defiant.

There was no sign of a trail, there was nothing but the whistle and screeching of the drift. It seemed that great winged birds were also being blown about in that maelstrom, beating their wings about, muttering ghastly guttural moans. Crag, veteran of these ice highways, was at the point of calling the "Come in" command. There is but one thing to do when as now, the very God above shows nothing but a clenched fist, that is to pull up and strike camp. To cover up; man and dogs huddled together, to be even blanketed by the snows; but *wait* they must. No human being has as yet been successful in a battle against a Norton Sound blizzard. There has been one thing however that has outraced the storm fiend—has outgeneralled the king of the depths and winds—and that one thing is the champion lead trail malamute.

"When it's time to lay down and quit, he'll come in of his own accord. What's the use of me butting in on this business?" thought Crag. "This is Brandy's own game. He knows every angle of it. And what I know of the trail work,

he has taught me! But I would like to know where the hell we are, just at this present minute. As far as I personally am concerned, we're gone!"

These were the disturbing reflections that consumed the mail carrier as he clutched the handle bars and shoved the sleigh along in whatever direction Brandy led them. The snow lashed them viciously. It was wet and sleetlike. There were times that Crag was certain that it wasn't snow at all that whipped his face. It was spray! That's what it was, *ocean spray!* They were not far from open water! And that's why Brandy wouldn't "come in" and suggest the laying to until the blizzard blew over!

Everything was a dull indistinct lead colour, the dog had absolutely nothing to guide him on. Nothing but a heaven-given instinct that Crag had long since come to respect, as he did nothing else on earth. Once he started, and cried a high pitched "Haw, boy." Crag heard the splashing of great sea monsters. Every dog in the team heard it too. And they heard the uncanny yawnglike cries of sea lions—ogrooks, we call them here in Alaska—as they sported in the blackness of the Sound waters. But the water they never did see. Brandy came off the tack upon which

he had been running and raced away from the swishing sounds frantically.

Suddenly he was thrashing on in thick snow that walled up before him; it was like climbing a mountain of soft drift that gave no grip for his feet. Then he broke through and felt sickening water about his toes—slush it was, greasy dangerous slush—half snow and half water. The dogs pressed him close now; they were filled with the fear that they could suppress no longer. They whimpered their misgivings and snapped at each other. Then they shot down an incline like a toboggan dip. The ice had upheaved behind them and tossed the whole outfit into the trough of its break. Water surged about them in a terrifying flood. Brandy plunged at the wall which rose before him sheer and precipitous. He gained the crest of it and gave tongue to a wild cry of conquest. As he did he jerked the whole team and sleigh with such abrupt force that Crag, who had been hanging to the handle bars, felt them slip from his grasp and he fell back into the cairnlike crevice. He called to the dogs as he tried with hands and feet to get some hold that would lift him to the trail level, but the more he endeavoured to scale the yielding snow the deeper

did he sink. It was like quicksand, his efforts to free himself from the maw of the snow cave accomplished nothing but to more firmly imbed him in its depths. Crag raised his eyes to the darkness that obscured the heavens and breathed a few fervent words to the God who had placed him where he now found himself.

It took but a flash of his brain to show him that unless some providential intervention occurred, and that, before very long, there were four or five separate and distinct ways in which he would soon be a mail carrier—*that had been.*

He felt that he was sinking slowly, deeper and deeper to the bottom of the suddenly formed ice-cave. How far it was to that bottom he couldn't tell—water covered it. How much water, he knew not! It seemed to Crag that it must have been a tidal wave that rushed behind them and carried the ice before it like a river carries logs on the crest of its surging current. The water was seeping up to the snow in which he was now imbedded. Crag found heart to thank his God that He hadn't sent along a chilling temperature with the break-up storm. He prayed for the dogs too. He concentrated on Brandy. How long would the heroic leader go on before he discovered that

master no longer rode the runners, or plunged along behind the sleigh hanging on to the handle-bars.

Crag breathed deep and called his leader's name at top pitch of his lungs. It sounded to him as though the blizzard fiends mockingly took his cry and hurled it back to him in his cave. He tried a final move to gain freedom but it cost him a few inches in distance toward the inky water beneath him. He relaxed himself then and thoughts that embraced long forgotten episodes in his life came to him—an endless phantasmagoria. But king of the trailmen he still was, and even though he saw his life unfold before him and realisation of what that meant at this moment—he again offered praise to the Almighty that he had lived a full and useful life. *The world owed him nothing.* But Brandy, what would become of him? Who would take care of him? Where was he now? This was the weakest period of his imprisonment. Crag fought back choking tears at thought of the malamute's mourning for his lost master.

At that very second Brandy was doing precious little mourning—he was piling back as fast as legs of lead would permit, toward the spot

where last he had heard his owner's voice. The dog remembered the call distinctly; it was just as the ice eruption occurred; but he thought it a cheer to blend with his own battle cry. Now he knew it was the appeal of master to him—dog—to stay by him, to not run away from him. He must have gone on a mile before he realised that the familiar chirp or the encouraging "yip-yip" was missing in the screeching winds at his back. He stopped and cast a look at the sleigh to see that the beloved form was there no more. There was no interval of indecision in his next move. He fairly catapulted the string on the back-track. Whiner, his gee-side swing trailer, whimpered a plaintive remonstrance which started the whole team crying in reluctance. It was just what the supreme leader required to bring all his fighting blood to a seething boil.

He plunged forward, dragging the entire six after him—bang into the onslaught of the steel-splinter-like snow. Guided by nothing but his marvellous dog sense—or super-sense—and fighting every malamute behind him, he dug on, calling upon every atom in his body for its last effort to get back to where master now awaited him. The team dogs hung back—they dragged—at

least it so felt to Brandy, but really, now, they were responding to their leader's control over them and were doing their utmost. But that utmost was way below what the leader demanded just then.

It was a snail's pace for Brandy.

And then it came to him. The voice of master ahead—dead ahead! It sped to Brandy on the howling blast of the south-wester. Like a powerful chord of deep music the well known kennel call of Crag struck into his soul—and not only his—it now filled the rest of the dogs with the lust to win speedily to their master's aid. Its lament was unmistakable. They all ploughed on in desperation. They felt the sleigh careen and then turn over completely as they lunged into a mountainous obstacle of heaved-up ice and drift snow. Its bow runners shot into this opposing face and stuck the sleigh there like a barb—firmly anchored.

The wheel team sprawled helplessly on the ridge of the upheaval while the rest of the dogs hung suspended below them in a mist-filled yawning pit. Brandy, their leader, had recognised this spot the instant that it loomed before him and without a thought for what may come

behind him, or the menace of the chasm before him, he dove clear of its brink—in his nostrils the body scent of the only thing that existed in his world. Rather a thousand deaths by the side of his master here in this deadly depression, than any luxurious life that the future may hold without him.

The lead malamute felt the impetus of his plunge suddenly checked—but not out of gripping reach of the all but obliterated form of his beloved master. Crag had sunk deeper—almost too deep—his head had dropped forward to his chest. He had about given up when through his glazed eyes he saw—or seemed to see—a fierce, wild looking thing of grey spring clear of the crater brim of what he thought was to have been his sepulchre. Crag saw in that flashing fraction of time a fighting pair of ears laid flat against a wide wolf head, he saw four gleaming ivory tusks in a red mouth, and his ears were filled with Brandy's triumphant squeal as the beast volplaned to where he was.

Black, brilliant eyes shone into his dulled ones; Crag felt the hot breath of his incomparable trail dog on his cheek and then he knew the sharp pain of a cut that laid his jaw open as though it had

been slashed with a lance. The blood spurted from the wound and with its surge Crag was brought back to a vivid realisation of things temporal.

Brandy's fangs gripped his parka at the shoulder, but when he felt the dog release this hold and begin to lick his lacerated face, for the time all thoughts of escape were lost in the embrace in which he crushed his champion to his heart. The beast lavished the love of all his years into the effort to stanch the blood he had himself in his miscalculation caused to flow. He spoke to his master. *Crag thought they were the most human words he had ever heard.*

The sleigh bells rang in Crag's ears. He knew himself to be comfortably dressed. His treasure ran out free at the head of his string and with his muzzle thrown high he sang out the jubilant song of his heart. The climbing up the breathing chain from the murky dreadful abyss, to the trail level, and the pulling up of the dogs after him were as a hazy dream of long ago. . . .

Crag felt a hand press his shoulder. He opened his eyes to see Corbersier, the river man, standing before him.

"Hello, Crag," said the bronzed mail carrier. "I'm over to see Ross about raisin' our pay. That last trip I made back to Nulato makes me think that the work is worth more money. How did you make it across the Sound? All O. K., I hope. You found your playground a bit wet, didn't you?"

"Yes, Corbersier, it was a bit wet but the sport has its compensations," said Crag reflectively as the other stalked off.

Crag breathed deeply of the warm air.

"Gee, Brandy, this sun is wonderful," he whispered to the slumbering dog, "and God is God above all—and as for you, old boy, what dog words are there that I can bark or howl long enough—to proclaim what you are!"

"KING OF THE MALAMUTES"

III

"KING OF THE MALAMUTES"

IT was two o'clock, the dead hour of a pale, dreary, new born day. The oppressive stillness was occasionally assailed by the sharp, rifle-like detonations of the cabin ridgepole and rafters. They writhed and snapped as if in vehement remonstrance to the chill of the freezing temperature which persistently crept from the outside of the cabin as if to rout the comfortable warmth within.

In the cabin a man sat pre-occupied, absorbed, gazing into the glowing core of a spruce root burning in a great fire place before him. Behind, his shadow cast a black, weird-looking blotch on the wall. In the darkness of this shadow was a door that opened on a hallway that led to a room in another wing of the cabin. This room had

an occupant who at the present time was sleeping, or was supposed to be asleep.

Blake's head was shot forward from his shoulders and from the under-thrust of his chin and the tightly drawn lines about his mouth he appeared to be suffering some terrible agony of recollection or present unrest. His right hand hung loosely from his knee and held, with what seemed to be the minimum of effort, a sinister looking blued Colt's "forty-one."

At his left side, watching his master with the wakeful eyes of a lynx, lay a huge beast of grey; King, an Alaskan wolf-bred trail dog.

The fire threw a shaft of light into another chamber, curtained off from this main part of the living room by a pair of shawl portières which were now caught back, permitting the heat from the hearth to radiate there. In this section of the cabin slept the watching man's wife, Beatrice Blake, and a son born but the winter before. Blake could see the outline of her figure, a slim girlish creature; she now slumbered peacefully, a childish repose undisturbed by the rankling disquietude that comes to those who think too deeply or who know the twist of the double-bitted torture iron in their heart.

Three and a half years before the episode of this ever to be remembered night, Hubert Blake had landed on the strand of Nome, a ruddy complexioned, healthy youth, with all the buoyancy that ambition to conquer worlds and the age of twenty-four inspire. To-night he looked as though the waters of Time had ground-sluiced away the soft boyish contours of a handsome face and left in their place, as bed-rock is thus exposed, nothing but dark hollows and sharp granite-like angles. At twenty-seven the merciless North and the equally fiendish tongue of scandal had made of Blake a man of forty.

None of the sleeping occupants knew or even dreamed of Blake's presence in the cabin at this hour; and the stars be praised, none suspected or had the slightest intimation of the deadly thing he at any minute was determined to do. The husband and father was here on a mission of wholesale extermination!

Blake contemplated the babe in its trundle bed by the side of its mother. He noted with a hardening, cynical smile the little arm and the dimpled hand with the chubby fingers that extended through the lattice bars. When the thought of the baby's name, Hubert, Junior, came to him he

straightened as if he had been slapped in the face.

At this convulsive movement, King the malamute jumped up wagging his tail and sniffed at the face of his master as though to soothe him in his time of mental agony. Blake looked at the dog perplexed, he could not quite understand that King was not in this instance in complete sympathy with him. In effecting their noiseless entrance to the cabin the malamute had been as comprehensive as a human sleuth; he understood that silence was required of him and not until now when he sniffed at Blake's face did he cause the slightest sound. Blake had raised the malamute from a tiny cub, and so carefully had he developed each of the extraordinary senses of the pup that in time he came to consider King a companion that no human being could quite replace.

The dog's intuition was to Blake nothing short of marvellous, and so intimately had they become affiliated one with the other that a look of the eye or a movement of the body of either master or dog was instantly interpreted for what it was meant to convey. King had the wonderful faculty of analysing and even anticipating motives in others which were of live concern to his master, at least so Blake had eventually come to believe.

Often when he was perplexed or harassed by some mystifying situation, the swish or sudden drooping of King's tail would fill Blake with either positive assurance or negative alarm. The dog gave him the key to the obtuse perplexities of life in much the same manner that the barometer fortifies the mariner against the impending visitations of the unknown elements at sea.

When Beatrice finished the trip whose interminable miles ended in the arms of Hubert Blake on the Arctic shore, the bridegroom-elect was overjoyed to see that King was but little less enraptured to welcome her than was he himself. From henceforth the grim, hard country took on a hue of roseate splendour. Before this, to Blake the heights of Parnassus had been but an elaborate figure of mythological speech; but now in the muddy, sluggish sluice-waters that flowed from the top of Anvil mountain he saw the sacred fountains of the Goddess Castalia, and the rude log cabin he had prepared for the sweetheart of his youth, was indeed the holy sanctuary of Apollo. He felt that with the advent of Beatrice into the concrete scheme of things, and—he confessed it to himself—King's indisputable approval of her,

that the world was unfolding for him like a springing flower.

Three things Blake adored above life itself; Beatrice, his wife, Tom Parsons, his life long friend, and King—the dog. Possibly a more accurate classification would place the last of the three—first. Next, however, in the order of his consideration was his work. Blake figured that the ultimate success of his work would bring the happiness which was ever the goal for which he strove. His dream embraced evergreen rolling hills, racing streams with shaded pools in which the trout sported, all in a far away country with his loved ones by his side. God smiling upon him and his, when life's golden sun would be dropping to the hills.

Too soon was this idyllic vision to be shattered and come crashing about his ears, plunging him, for a spell at least, into the deepest despondency. For the past two weeks now, murder had lurked in the recesses of his soul like an ophidian specter. Accident had placed Blake in possession of facts that ordinarily he could have never got, except through confession or actual detection.

His work had to do with the important science of hydrostatics; the conserving and control of

water power. To his employers, he had become indispensable in this development of the country's tremendous resources. His duties necessitated his presence continually at the head waters of the rivers and streams that issued from the Sawtooth range a hundred miles north from Nome. From the time that the springtime Arctic sun had taken the frost from the tundra and left it soft and yielding to the devices of his engineer's craft, until the freeze-up at the end of a swift hundred and twenty days, the town of Nome saw but little or nothing of Hubert Blake.

During this interval of enforced separation from Beatrice he consigned her to the care and protection of his partner, Tom Parsons. Blake and Parsons had beaten it over the Chilcoot Pass together and then in the summer of 'ninety-nine, had drilled down the Yukon when the Nome diggings were heralded to the world as the original treasure caves from which had come the riches and splendour of Nineveh. Side by side they had grimed in the spuming face of deadly rapids—had strained shoulder to shoulder with all the strength in their young bodies to put their cumbersome Yukon flat-boat—a sluggish whip-sawed craft—over the shoaling flats. It was a two for one and

a one for two coalition, a partnership that had not the slightest cleft in which to insert the wedge of dissolution.

King, the malamute, loved Parsons mainly because of his master's profound attachment to him. But so far as an equal division of his loyalty, that could not be. King was a "one man" dog. All malamutes are "one man" dogs. King had but one master. There was but one bunk that he would sleep beside, and that Blake's. There was but one hand from which he would accept food, when there was food to accept. When not, then King would take from whomever he could *steal.* As a surreptitious pilferer King was without an equal among the wolf-dogs. No ham-bone swinging from a tent ridge-pole was safe if King was in a thieving mood.

At bed time the dog had a habit of going to the side of Blake's bunk and nosing his muzzle into the master's hand and so almost compel a good-night caress; at the same time he would sit for a second or two with his head bowed in an human-like attitude of worship. These evidences of fealty Blake interpreted as direct blessings from God on High.

The people of Nome found much time for the

pursuit of diverting pleasure, even in the hustle and rush of the open summer season. There were excursions on the open flat car of the Wild Goose Railroad to the rich placers of Anvil Creek, or fair weather sails on the placid waters of Behring Sea to the sea-coast bonanzas. In town there were always dancing parties and home gatherings. The new town throbbed with the excitement and ecstasy of young life.

Beatrice Blake and Tom Parsons were always of the happiest of these pleasurable parties—constantly together; and out of this devotion that one evidenced for the other, rose a scandal which, handed from mouth to mouth, was soon the subject of much discussion in Nome.

"One would think that he was married to her, the way he watches her." "You know the old story about the best friend." "Poor Blake, he's way out in the Grand Central hills working his head off and look what he's getting here in town from Beatrice and Tom; and the two of them living alone in the cabin, too!" These and other things began insidiously to float around Nome during the first summer that Beatrice lived there. Fortunately these shafts never found a mark in either Beatrice or Parsons. They were both too

completely lost in love and adoration of the absent husband and friend.

Oblivious to the shrugging of shoulders and the lifting of virtuous brows Beatrice lived for Hubert Blake—and kept house for Tom Parsons!

Winter came with its ensuing festivities in Nome and Hubert Blake knew the first joys of honeymooning; now, Tom made himself a considerate absentee from the cabin as often and much as it was possible for him to do so. This, of course, was misconstrued by the busy scandal mongers.

The rigours of the Alaskan winter were to Hubert Blake like the languid breezes of the warm south seas. With his bride he frolicked about the country like a happy school boy. In the springtime, as if to crown this perfect season, the Blake cabin received a little stranger. A rollicking, chubby, beautiful boy. Hubert Blake walked on clouds, he was too happy! He knew life's utmost joy. Later during the summer nights as he rode the ditch line with King trotting along at his horse's heels he would confide his bliss to the heavens—singing as he went along, the happiest of men. He saw his dream coming true; a few more years at the most, and his work

would be over—then for the fruits of his toil—it was heavenly.

One day Blake had to meet some of the company officers, and a back room of the Pilgrim River road house was decided as the place for the proposed gathering. He arrived there ahead of the party and went to the designated room to wait for them. As usual King followed him closely. A thin partition divided this room from a similar one in which some creek men were talking lowly over a card game and the clinking of bottles and glasses. Blake did not in any way attend their conversation until he heard the name of Tom Parsons mentioned. He became immediately alert and gradually as he listened his face turned from a healthy glowing brown to a deathly ashen grey—and King suddenly rose with bared fangs and every guard hair of his spine in fierce fighting attitude.

"Why," a voice went on, "the thing Boss Blake oughter do is to take a gat and go down there and blow that blankety-blank Parsons to kingdom come—yes, and the woman too! Say, what she's handin' to that boy." "It's sure a rotten deal," added another, "and the poor kid's so nutty over her that I don't suppose that he'll ever get wise

to the dope that the youngster is light, when both he and his missis are damned near as black as this ace of spades. Say, boys, take it from me, that's Parsons' kid!"

Hubert felt the floor come up and pitch down again like a raft in the billows—he braced himself convulsively for more which he knew would follow; then he heard further:

"Why, he could get them with the goods if only some one would tip him off—but gee, the husband's always the sucker. He never gets the inside information. Why, I heard that Bill McCabe passed the cabin way after midnight the other night and seen Parsons' shadow on the curtain. Now what the hell is he prowlin' around there at that time of night for when he oughter be in his own room asleep where he belonged? He's a queer guy, that Parsons; he must have a pelt like a rhino or somethin'—he goes around Nome like he owned the Wild Goose besides the boss's missis——"

King brought Blake back to earth, the dog bounded against the partition and yelled a screeching, challenging cry as if to nail the poisonous slanderer to the cross. Hubert took this demonstration as positive confirmation of what he had

been forced to listen to. He staggered out of the road house—out into the open; he needed a wide breathing space. Gone were the thoughts of the proposed meeting. He lifted himself into the saddle and rode away to the ditch-camp, leaving no message for his expected officials.

Higgins, the owner of the road house, asked him if he would be returning, and paled at the look he received in place of a reply. "Boss Blake"—as he was called on the creeks—had come out of that back-room a changed man. Higgins thought of the story he had read about a drug that changed a handsome looking doctor into a terrifying dwarfed fiend and wondered if he had any of that stuff on his shelves in the road house.

To the under engineers and shift bosses it now was a queer Boss Blake from whom they took their day's working schedule. The old snap was gone from the commands. Blake issued his orders as though in a trance and when speaking, his gaze shifted and his demeanour seemed abstracted and vacant.

During the dark nights that had descended like a pall on the river valleys and mountains he

now grimly stalked the ditch-bank, the omnipresent King at his heels. Blake cried out the inexpressible desolation of his soul to the gleaming pitiless worlds above. In the privacy of his cabin he gloated like a miser with his hoard, over a blue-black shooting iron—he caressed the slugs as he dropped them one by one into the cylinder. Six it held—and against the law of the plainsman—he taxed its capacity with six cartridges. Five he had finally determined to use. The sixth, which now reposed in the hammer chamber, would be the extra pellet against a possible miss-fire. He was going to clear the earth of his entire world—the job was to be a wholesale one of extermination; not a killing of one or two arch evil-doers. Each unit of the quintette which composed his all was to taste of the philtre of death! Yes, even to King. There would be no grey mourning malamute wailing a dirge over his master's snow-covered grave. He'd have them bury King with him; he, after all, was the only true thing that he had ever known in all of his life.

The agony of suspense could be endured no longer, he must at least have the ocular proof before he carried out his fatal arrangements. Man

and dog went to Nome, and there, lurking within gunshot of the cabin living room, their weird vigil began. That night he was to test the truth of the statement of the back-room gossipers.

While he stood there praying that no shadowed form would be cast by the fire glow against the curtain the supplication froze on his breath. Parsons' figure stood there in striking relief—his form outlined sharp and black against the screen. Transfixed, Blake beheld the silhouette and as he looked he became suddenly bereft of animation—life seemed for the second absolutely suspended. And in that instant of inertion the form vanished! He became aware, as he stood there shaking and irresolute, that King had hold of his coat and was trying to draw him away from the cabin. This beseeching act of the dog triumphed and Blake retracked his way to the ditch camp in the hills.

For a week ensuing he fed a maniac's soul the food it now craved. He was wildly exultant in the anticipation of the thing he finally determined upon carrying through—even in the face of certain negative signs from King! He thought of the road house back-room and recalled that the dog was standing against the partition through

which had come the fatal words. Blake saw again the bared fangs of the wolf-dog and then his wild plunge at the wall as if to tear it down and spring upon the speakers on its other side. To Blake this was proof that the men who spoke of the wreck of his household were telling truths. But the wolf-dog knew the talk for what it was, a fiendish slander, and was crying and snarling out his outraged opposition to it. But in Blake's first paroxysm of rage he was of the blind who would not see.

What solace Blake could extract from this desperate state of affairs he found in the soothing companionship of his dog King. He shunned the men of the ditch line workings as if they were the plague. In the look of every man, in every stone, he saw "dupe" written in searing symbols. From the malamute only did he receive the sympathy which could in any manner relieve his anguish. But the dog's efforts to carry conviction that all was well had at last become futile. They could not convince Blake that the child born to Beatrice—he loathed the name now—was his own. And then he had seen Parsons where he surely had no right to be, at that hour. No, the

time had come and the will to do the deed came with it.

Again Blake and the dog went to Nome. The trip was timed so that he would arrive at the cabin an hour after midnight when the scene would be properly set for his deadly purpose.

It was a sharp fall night that was just suited for an undetected entrance of the cabin. It creaked and snapped in the grip of the frost and as Blake's moccasined footfalls fell across the verandah they too sounded like the cracking of the cabin timbers. King's padded feet were noiseless as he stepped alongside his master.

A great chair was drawn up before the fireplace. A choking sigh escaped from Blake as he thought of the care and time he had given to the building of that chair—how he had dreamed of it, he sitting in its recesses and Beatrice by his side. A fool's paradise it had been for the first winter that he had used it. He stood at its back now thinking that Parsons may perhaps be seated in it. He held the black gun on the back of the chair and approached it cautiously; it was empty. King went to the chair wagging his tail and looking up at his master with an undeniable friendly message in his eyes. Blake ignored the dog.

The sound of deep breathing came to him from the other end of the room and for the first time Blake saw the figure of his wife, blissfully asleep with the child in the trundle bed by her side. He stood gazing in awed meditation, unknowingly he bared his head and brought his hands—one holding the Stetson hat and the other the Colt's gun—to his sides in an attitude of adoration.

Before him slept the woman he loved—and—he could not suffer himself to think or he should begin the job at the wrong end. Perhaps fail in it! He would then arouse the man in the other part of the cabin and thus give him an opportunity to escape the vengeance about to descend upon him.

He sank into the chair and King curled up at his feet. Man and dog to watch and wait. Blake stroked the dog's head and stared into the eyes that had never failed him. He saw them an hour hence with the glazed film enshrouding their clear light. His other hand gripped the gun handle. Blake felt that the terrible deed would soon be over; his heart now thirsted for blood—the madman's craving for the expiation of this unspeakable wrong that had come to his threshold.

Suddenly he started. Blake heard the approaching footfall in the hallway. He set himself to fire at the first appearance of the well-known figure. On it came, a deliberate step as if Parsons were carrying a light rather than walking in the darkness of the hall. A hand was on the door knob; Hubert did not move a muscle; he sat transfixed holding the gun at a shooting angle, waiting for the door to open and Tom Parsons to enter. His mind was abruptly diverted to the antics of King, the malamute. The dog's tail kept slapping the floor—slap, slap, it went, as if to welcome the man on the other side of the door now approaching and about to enter this room.

The door opened, and Parsons entered clad only in pajamas; he advanced to the middle of the room and stood there in absolute unconcern. Blake's shooting arm extended from his shoulder in inanimate suspension. Some great mystifying influence was at work within him. Parsons looked at him as a man of some other world, on the clear forehead large globules of perspiration formed and were streaming down his face. King kept up the incessant wagging of his tail and even jumped up half joyously and sniffed at Parsons' hands cordially.

Blake was aghast. The hands could not feel the warmth of that sniff nor could the ears of Tom Parsons hear the sound of it. King licked Parsons' bare feet, looking up at his master as he did so. He tried to tell Blake that Parsons felt that lick no more than if it were but a part of his dream!

Parsons gazed in the direction of the chamber where the sleeping mother and child lay—then he turned and faced the fire. But he looked with unseeing eyes. Blake saw his shadow cast in striking relief against the curtain, and King still wagged the unmistakable wireless message that all was well.

Blake's partner and friend, led by the hand of the queer goddess who takes us out of our beds and leads us out on the edge of giddy cornices and overhanging precipices, was again guided by her to the hall door in the black shadow cast by the chair before the fire. With his sleep-blinded eyes he again deliberately turned the knob and was conducted by his weird pilot to his own room.

King came to his master and offered the solicitude of the thoroughbred that he was. A quiet, dignified appeal for master to put his trust completely in the dog. Then, as if adding a million-

fold radiance to the light which now beamed for Hubert Blake, the dog patted over to the trundle bed where lay the sleeping child and nosed his muzzle into the chubby hand which hung through the bars. No other human being except Blake had ever had this attention from King. Blake knew it for a sign extraordinary. After the malamute had helped himself to this caress from young Hubert—he bowed his head against the bed. For King it was the shrine made of the bed of his master's son!

The other—the father—came on bended knees, approaching the Mercy Seat trembling and contrite—before the couch of the purest gem in God's diadem.

FLYING ARROW

IV

FLYING ARROW

CUTTING stood on the bluff which commanded a sweeping view of the frozen river, expecting at any minute to see the mail carrier's team swing into sight and the dogs come bounding to the end of their regular sixty-mile run from Golovin. O'Connor, the mail carrier, was an hour or so behind his usual arrival time in Council City. And O'Connor's time of departure and his run up from White Mountain were such matters of precise regularity with him that if, as now, he were a bit behind that running time it meant that some obstacle on the trail had been encountered and had retarded him.

Cutting could see far down the river. A great cloud of steam hung like a snowy vapour over the trail. By this sign he accounted for the trailer's

tardiness. The river at that point was overflowing the bed-ice, and he pictured the torture that the mail carrier was enduring, possibly at that very instant, while trying to get to the ice-trail once again.

Finally O'Connor hove into view, and Cutting sighed both with relief and apprehension: relieved that O'Connor, whom he loved, had escaped the treachery of the overflow; apprehensive because Norah, his daughter, must make the return trip, and the still more hazardous voyage from Golovin along the Behring coast line to Nome.

Cutting breathed deep of the sharp air, and each of his steps as he heavily retracked to his cabin was marked with a devout prayer for the child who languished within its log walls.

Next morning, while the sun was doing his utmost to break through the banked clouds and flood the trees and plains with a dazzling whiteness, Miles O'Connor was heard outside the Cutting cabin, speaking to his crack team dogs and preparing the sleigh robes for the precious freight they were soon to receive. He passed to each of the dogs and spoke to them as if they comprehended his meaning. There was not a trailer in

the team who could not read the slightest change of its master's face, let alone understand the tone of his voice, so well had they come to know each other.

Inside, the nurse from the Wild Goose emergency station had prepared Norah against the intense cold. Cutting put on a brave face, considering the anguish of his heart. There was something in the look of the girl's eye and the feel of her skin that startled him at times—he had seen the same look and noted the same condition once before, just before her mother. . . . He fought back the ashen shade that he felt was rising to his cheeks and assumed a cheerfulness which even the dulled sight of Norah readily saw was a miserable counterfeit.

"Come, father, cheer up. Think what a wonderful ride I'm going to have; it is too divine for words that Mr. O'Connor is going to take me; and those marvellous dogs, father—you know how I love them. It will be glorious!"

"Yes, and Miles will take care of you like you're his own little sister. You'll come back to your father in the spring, and he won't know you with the blush on your cheeks and the old laughter in your eyes, my dear."

Tenderly O'Connor lifted her from the bed in the cabin and carried her like a wee babe to the folds of the sleigh furs; he was quick in the work of getting under way. For some reason he was strangely nervous, a sort of flighty exhilaration; he could not quite analyse the feeling. He had watched Norah grow and break into his vision like the budding and blooming of a lily. Frail and timid she had always been; a pale, beautiful being from some far-removed world, she had seemed to Miles, from the day he had first seen her until this very day, when with her womanhood had come invalidism.

O'Connor was of the type that can challenge the elementary fury of the North. When the blizzard howled its fiercest or the rivers raced in their deadliest frenzy, O'Connor, with a laughing heart, proclaimed himself their master. So when Norah's father told him that the girl was to be intrusted to his care for the time that it would take for the trip to Nome, that upon his manhood and trailing skill depended her health, her very life, the wild man in O'Connor, the mightier-than-Fate part of him, sprang to this love-task, determined that because of her coming into the realm

of his responsibility, there would be no failing and no—*death.*

"It's a high compliment that ye're paying me, sir," he said to Cutting. "I don't need a field-glass to see what opinion you hold of me; an' by this toime maybe ye've come to a way of feeling what you—and Norah—mean to me, Mr. Cutting. I've loife aplenty, sir, and hopes of Paradise to come when I go over the hill; I'm placing them both in the hollow of the little girl's hand, and there they'll be until we pull up at St. Mary's hospital in Nome—and after that too, begorra!"

The father clutched O'Connor's extended hand, and bent for an instant over the sleigh—thus he bade them Godspeed and farewell.

To Norah this going away was all hazy and indistinct; it was as if she were being borne along on the softest of fleecy clouds. Although she was feeling much better this morning than she had for weeks, she knew it was the buoyancy bred of excitement; for when she felt the power of O'Connor's arms as they slid under her to lift her, like a mighty wave floats a shell, she sank into his cradled embrace weak and relaxed.

As he carried her from the bed to the sleigh she was conscious of a thrill which penetrated to

her very soul. Since first she had beheld the Indian-like O'Connor and had heard his mellow voice and the whimsical brogue that shot through his phrases, she had instantly framed him as the dominant figure in all her girlish romances of love and deeds of daring. As she grew, and with her growing came the sickness, she became more and more intense in the worship of her hero. It was a hopeless, helpless idolatry over which she had no control. *She* was the languishing princess chained to her couch by the heaviest and most unbreakable of fetters; *he*, the dashing squire with her gauntlet at his belt, fighting back the whole world to make a triumphant roadway for her. She was now living the ecstasy of those dreams.

She knew the running time of the mail schedule as well as did the mail carrier himself; and always she had fancied herself by his side, his guiding fairy spirit to shield him from the dangers of the trail. And now she was actually with him—floating off the Council Heights, like flying, it seemed, as the team dogs rushed on with the ringing of their harness bells and the singing of the steels which shod the sleigh runners, to the river trail below—a whole mile below.

The dogs took the glaring trail aggressively; there were conquest and confidence in the entire string. They sensed the import of this mission. Life and love were the stakes in this race. Before this they'd known that behind them, either in dead metal weight or in the bulky canvas sacks, rode the treasure of Master's government, and they would plod on in the fulfilment of their day's toil. But on this trip they were giving Master everything they had, as he had asked of them at the start, feeling that in the springy craft which they drew reposed the empress of his heart —they were with him to the tips of their frosted guard hair.

They had much of crust and water going between Council and White Mountain, but at sundown, when the blue, hazy twilight descended, and the Wild Goose station lights shone like glowing ember splotches ahead of them, they drew on their reserve vitality, and as one dog, from Grey Cloud to Chief and Buck, they raised their finish cry, a chorus of joyful yells. Another day's work was done; they had served again, and were soon to feel the caressing hands of Master as he tended their lacerated feet and placed before them their warm supper.

Again Norah felt the great beating heart of the man as he held her gently to him—"just like Mother used to carry me," she thought—and carried her up the steep incline where Mother Garrard and Woodson, her blue-grass lord, waited to welcome her.

By nightfall of the next day, when Dexter's finally had been reached, the mail team had met with every known freak and fancy of the winter trail. First, between Fox River and the Horseshoe it was one continuous overflow, most all of the going being on portage and bank trail or in water up to the sleigh bed. On the flats at the head of the Chinik lagoon it was glare ice, not a speck or patch of gripping snow for miles. A strong fair wind out of the Fish River head mountains blew dogs and sleigh in a sidereal direction, much against their frantic endeavour to get a scratch hold and cling to the true course. Miles made fun of it all. When a severe blast took the outfit square abeam, he whooped like a schoolboy, and while the dogs, huddled together and being blown wherever the wind drove them, whimpered and howled, O'Connor held to the handle-bars and rode the runners in great glee.

His humour infected Norah; she felt the surge

of invigorating air to her lungs; unconsciously she was breathing deep, exultant breaths. She felt that a fighting man had transmitted something of his spirit to her. From that moment she *demanded* life, and for the doctors to whom she was going for treatment, half the battle was won.

All that was visible of her were two clear blue eyes and a wisp of brown hair across the whitest of foreheads. To see Miles she had to lift her lashes and raise her eyes as though looking toward the sky; the sight of her dream-knight in action was the most stimulating draught she had taken since the beginning of her illness. The drift snow, dust-like and cutting, had fringed his wolverine-trimmed parka hood, and in this glistening aura his granite-like features seemed to Norah like those of an ancient war-god.

O'Connor looked down at her, and all oblivious to the careening, skidding outfit, his soul leaped into the look—and Norah dropped her eyes, leaving him the tantalising sight of dark fringes on an alabaster skin.

In the morning it took but a few minutes for the racing dogs to make the end of the Golovin highland and speed the sleigh toward the west-

ward ice-trail. O'Connor, try as he would to concentrate on the guidance of the team, could not shake the fact which stuck in the very core of his heart. He knew himself to be a chain-bound captive in the mesh of love. His mind blanketed the entire scheme of his former heart attachments. There was no woman who could quite qualify in his eyes for just comparison with the girl now in his care.

He threw himself into the serious business of out-racing a Norton Sound blizzard. It was right at their heels; the clouds walled up behind them black and ominous.

The speed imp was alive in the dogs; at their head Grey Cloud ran close to the trail. He fairly skimmed, a regular wolf shamble which overtakes distant trail marks like magic.

"Wind setting up-coast," thought Miles; "the wind is playing into the hand of the Asiatic current that takes this ice out av bed without a second's warning and sinds it away to sea; an' God help us if anny av us are caught."

There surely were bad omens aplenty that day. The tremendous sea power—the strength of the ocean tides—was working against the puny opposition of one man and seven malamute dogs.

Miles knew how surreptitiously, how insidiously, treacherously, the ocean rose and with its swell lifted the tons of ice from their coastal anchorage as though they were a cellar door afloat on its mighty bosom; then, with wind and ocean current working together, carried the entire mass to the expanses of the open sea.

Miles shuddered when he recalled the many trailers who had been trapped that way. They had gone insane, starved, eaten their dogs—yes, even pulled straws to determine which of themselves should serve as food.

Arriving at Solomon, Norah felt that the strain of the day's trip had told heavily on her; yet she could not forbear a slight tightening of her fingers on Miles' arm as he carried her from the sleigh to the road-house.

What she did was the involuntary act of her fingers. The contact of her body in the embrace of the only man in her love-world caused the convulsive contraction of her fingers, although her mind was doing its utmost to have her restrain any show of her real feeling.

When leaving Solomon the next morning O'Connor was abjured to beware the trail. He was told that Big Hurrah was a riot of rushing

water. "Hug the coast to Port Safety—and take care when you round the Cape!" These were the farewell words from the old-timers who gathered to wish them good-bye.

A thick drift snow was falling. Had it been head-on, it would have proved a blinding curtain against which even the mail carrier would not have ventured. But being plumb at their backs, it was not a storm to hold them from their journey. Although the thermometer hung at ten below freezing, still it was not particularly cold. A southeast snowstorm always brings a sort of negative comfort with it. And Norah was dressed to withstand fifty below zero.

The direct course from Port Safety to Nome is about a point north of west, but in order to clear the Nome Cape, which juts out into Behring Sea, the winter trail makes a detour to the southward and for three or four miles is on ice that in many places crusts six or seven fathoms of sea-water.

The government operator of the Port Safety wireless station told Miles that the trail had been flagged all the way around the Cape and on up to Nome River, where the trail again strung along the shore to Nome. He indicated the first of the standards about a half mile distant, and Miles

saw that from its head fluttered a red streamer.

"The boys have set them up at every hundred yards all the way to Nome River," said the station keeper, "so unless she's exceptionally thick, you haven't much chance to go wrong. It's some nasty, and it doesn't look like it's going to ease up any. I can't see beyond the first stake, but you'll be able to make them out when you hit the line."

"We're hitting it now—so good-bye and thanks," sang Miles as they went speeding away.

An hour afterward they were toiling on in the midst of a blinding blizzard that whirled the snow around them in whistling eddies—the storm wind was fierce and prankish; it raged from every direction. This was not the first time that Miles had been up against just such man-killing passion of the elements. And now as before he put his trust completely in the lead dog, which plunged on against the leaden drifts, always to fetch up at a red-topped standard and to inspire the rest of the team with his absolute mastery.

At the first descent of the blizzard O'Connor had folded Norah in the sleigh robes; she snuggled in the furs like a kitten in a down quilt. "I'm tucking ye away, Norah, so's to keep the snow out of your eyes—just go to sleep if ye can; we're

all hunkie-dorrie, fetching up foine at each stake. I say *we* are, but I'm having but divilish little to do with it. The Cloud's showing his blood, Norah. Sure he goes through this snow like a circus girl jumps through the paper hoop. And by that token the dog comes out just as safely on the other soide—having the advantage over the circus lady that he has no shpangles to lose in the ring nor quite as far to fall if he misses."

Norah fought down the impulse to say "Miles, my adorable Irishman," and a whole avalanche of tender expressions which flooded her brain whilst O'Connor arranged the robes and talked to divert her mind from the peril that she knew he was about to face for her.

The snow began fairly to boil after that. There were times when Miles was so bewildered that it was difficult for him to realise that the world was not spinning around like a top. Once his faith wavered in the grey lead dog; he thought Cloud was off on the wrong direction. "Gee, Cloud! Gee, boy! Ye're going to sea!" he shouted.

The dog, obedient, came off the tack for an instant but gradually worked back to it again, and as he did so he whinnied a rebuke to Miles for questioning his sense of direction. It was the

only time that his ears and tail drooped from their defiant stand. The sign of the master's indecision filled the whole team with a sudden panic. Taking their cue from Grey Cloud, as one dog they dropped their tails, semaphore-like, and cried out in remonstrance. Not until the leader was again on his first course between the trail stakes did they regain their spirits.

"It's all right, lad; I'll not open me face again. Have it anny way ye want it." While O'Connor thus cheered the leader, the standard loomed up dead ahead; he had to swing the sled abruptly to miss running into its block-ice foundation. "Now for the next one. We're way pasht the Cape and headed for the river, boys. Go on, Cloud," he urged; "you've forgotten more about running these snow blockades than auld man O'Connor's son Miles ever knew. More power to ye, acushla!"

Well did O'Connor have to send along some cheerful word to the lead dog. It was part confession to himself that some impending peril was upon them. There was a creepy moisture about the lashing snow that had the smell of salt water! He felt—or at times imagined that he felt—the whole ice-trail warp and writhe as though it were about to puff up and split in two. Sudden de-

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pressions seemed to form in the close-packed snow; they appeared in long weird-looking striation and then would close up again and leave the snow surface smooth and cushioned like the down of eider.

Some great uncanny force was playing with the sea ice! It was as if Neptune were flexing his titanic muscles beneath his frozen armour.

The nearest thing to fear that ever clutched at O'Connor's heart seized him now. Had he been the conveyor of nothing but inanimate mail pouches, past performances would have shown that he went through without a qualm. O'Connor, the premier trailsman of Alaska, topped a great form-sheet.

But now he experienced all the soul-racking anxiety that the master of an ocean liner feels when his ship speeds along the iceberg trail in a thick fog—except that Miles dreaded what the sea-captain would have welcomed: the open sea!

Miles felt so sure that his apprehensions were true that already he was arranging his plan of procedure. There was no doubt of it—they were on floating ice. The wind screeched in his ears and whipped his face with stinging sleet. All about him was a dense fog, smoke-like with the permeating tang of salt in it.

Only the lead dog maintained his absolute poise. Grey Cloud forged ahead with the assurance that he would pull up to and pass the trail stakes one after the other; that if there was open water it did not lie between him and the shore. He was on the anchor segment of the ice. The dog had no dread of menacing signs. His unconquerable spirit drove him dead ahead. But suddenly he veered over to the "haw" tack as though the Master had chopped a command at him, and quite as abruptly the black, sinister sea lay like an inkly gulf not twenty feet on their right.

There was no time to think of the horror of the situation. The fighting man took charge of affairs at the instant that the enemy to life appeared.

"Come in, haw! Cloud!" There was nothing of indecision in the command; it was the first order of defence. The leader spun back like a dart. When he stopped at the windward side of the sleigh, the next command, "Down, dogs," placed the dogs there until further orders, a furry protectorate of seven heat-radiating bodies for the girl in the sleigh.

O'Connor's first thought was of Norah; and as she was above all his chief consideration, he did

not disturb her. "Time enough to break the news to her," he thought, "when I've figured out my line of battle and 'tended to the preliminaries."

Going back where the leader had first cut from the trail, he saw that they had been coming along on an old track that led straight into the water. He went to the edge of the ice and peered through the mist. He could see the break on the other side; the sight of it set his heart beating with unspeakable joy; and there beckoning to him like a star of hope was a trail standard for which the lead dog was making with unerring precision. The bit of red bunting hung drooping from its staff, which leaned out over the water at almost a falling angle. It seemed to Miles to be just toppling into the black waters.

He noted that the main ice was setting to the westward, estimated its speed and by his pocket compass marked the course of the trail. The crimson-topped guide-post called to him; beyond it were safety and life—the means of rescue for the treasure in the sleigh—and Miles was impatient to heed the call. His duty was as plain before him as was his path blazoned by the fluttering strip of cloth.

How to break the news to Norah was the next

facer for him, but he went to the task without hesitation.

"Norah, will ye come out of the land of dreams?" he said as he lifted the robe and looked down into her eyes. "I don't know how to tell ye what we're up against—or rather what's up against us. Ye're not strong enough to fire a shotgun, are ye—darling? Well, if so ye were, I'm thinking we'll be after having some wild duck shooting pretty soon. Did ye know that it was the open season, Norah?"

"Oh, Miles, don't fidget so. Tell me—or shall I tell you? The ice! The open water that has bothered you on the whole trip? Have you come to it? Don't fear to tell me. Can't you see that I've got much stronger? We've work to do, Miles, and it's so glorious that I can do my share of it!"

"Here she is calling me Miles! Holy Saints," thought he, "this is a happy day!"

Still he could not understand how Norah knew what ill luck had befallen them, but the girl had really apprehended the danger from the moment that she had to forego the sight of the grey snows—and his grey-blue eyes—and what was going on all about. If she had not been of the stuff to "do her share of the work" she would never have

submitted to being almost smothered under the robes in order not to impede Miles in the slightest manner in this race with death.

"Won't you lift me so that I can see it, Miles?"

As he placed his arms about her he felt her twine hers around his neck and breathe his name again and again into his ears. He crushed her to him for the second, unmindful of her frail body. Then speaking softly to her, he said: "Norah, we have much to thank God for, darling. I'll not be gone long from ye. Just obey commands while ye're yet on this soide of the ice; something tells me I'm to be a blithering slave when we both stand safe and sound on its other soide. But, Norah, that'll be a rosy by and by.

"There's never annything so bad but it might be a bit worse. Sure if it had've been a low timperature this day, it makes me shudder for what might have happened; but as it is I'll be along the coast trail in half an hour—and before dark has set in we'll be back here with a big oomiak and you'll see the shining faces of some of the Nome River Indians and hear the joyful songs av thim—rejoicing that the Winter Dove has been spared for the Flying Arrow—that's me, darling.

"Now mind: if I'm gone that long—till dark,

I mean—I've fixed a torch in this gold-pan here. All you have to do is to strike a match, if ye think that ye have the strength, and loight it, and then with this snow-shoe shove it clear of the sleigh so's it won't set ye ablaze, darling.

"I'm leaving ye with them great dogs; and will ye just whisper a word to the Holy Father and thank Him for moild weather and Norah Cutting —and put in a word for me, if you please, because it's only toimes like this that I ever think of Him at all at all, and thin I haven't the nerve to ask Him for a bit av a boost. Now fold yourself up, dear, and do not try to see what I'm about."

This done, Miles wrote a note of instructions and making a packet of it, tied it about his neck. He then went to the dogs and bade them guard the sleigh. Whispering a farewell, he stalked to the edge of the ice, crouched there for a moment, then struck the water a cushion plunge and swam for the anchor ice of the other side. While working against the upcoast set of the current, he recalled—and the recollection seemed absurd at this time—that once before he had dropped into water (then unexpectedly) when he had a long run before him to reach shelter. It was forty below zero at that time. True, when he finally got

to Chinik, dragging two solid lumps of ice that once were his legs, the kerosene process of thawing was a bit heroic, but he survived it all right. "Why, this is child's play compared to that," he thought. "The water's warm and so is the air; it's a cinch, Miles. There was nothing at stake then but my miserable self, and I saved that without anny unnicissary exertion. Why, O'Connor, how can ye lose now with the weather clear and the thrack fasht, with Norah Cutting as the purse for the homestakes?"

He fetched up against the opposite face of the break almost before he knew it. He slid up on a shelving under-shoot of the ice, and with the help of his hunting steel he clambered to the edge of the wall, enthusiastic though saturated. He immediately attempted a yell to the side he had just left, but the wind threw it back at him with choking violence. He got into vigorous action, making for the trail stake with the utmost speed of which he was capable. He took no chance of cross-cutting but bounded along the break until he at last came to the government stake. He stopped for a second and saw that its base was firmly frozen to the main ice and that it was in

no immediate danger of toppling over and disappearing.

Then he began the race along the trail. His brain worked at high tension. There was nothing that he did not think of in this great endeavour—this supreme test of his timber.

He brought into play every faculty that Grey Cloud had taxed to keep to the trail—that was the first duty for his brain; he was always ten paces ahead of his feet. He used his eyes, and realised what an advantage he had over his lead dog because of his height in seeing ahead. His ears he strained for the slightest sound to direct him to some living being that would mean help for the girl out on the drifting ice. He inhaled the air, analysing each atom that entered his lungs in the hope of detecting the odour of some cabin fire. He demanded of each infinitesimal ligament and muscle in his whole superb frame its ultimate exertion. He taxed his brain to keep vividly awake. He *commanded* Fate to urge him on.

Through all the labyrinth of these conflicting mental and physical sensations O'Connor still felt the intoxicating softness of Norah's caress and the fragrance of her breath. It was fire to his soul and lent speed to his legs, which began to move,

as he thought, sluggishly. It seemed that they would never move fast enough. Had Miles been shot from the mouth of a cannon—it would still have been a snail's pace for him. His mind outstripped his frosted legs.

It was just between sundown and darkness, the fleet will-o'-the-wisp twilight of the Northland. Lieutenant Massey stood gazing from the front room of his quarters. Suddenly he jumped back and tore through the hall to the front door. He had seen a frosted apparition with the shape of a human being lunge into his dooryard. At the same time the commanding officer's orderly had bounded across the barracks street toward the falling object.

Another officer, who had been sitting by the fire, came close at Massey's heels. The three men carried Miles into the room and the orderly hastened for the Fort medico. Running true to form, O'Connor hadn't dropped until he delivered the goods. He was incased in a rattling, clinking sheath of ice; it covered him like a shroud. All those present knew the famous mail carrier, but with his frosted nose and cheeks and a livid mask of sheet ice almost obliterating what remained of

his features, he was beyond instant recognition.

Hutchinson cut the packet from about his neck and took it to the fire, feeling that its message would be all-important.

When Dr. Jerauld came, he had Miles taken outdoors again, and soon with deft professional skill he had the labour of reviving and thawing well along. Hutchinson unfolded and read the message; the precautionary lines of instruction which Miles had written before he had consigned himself to the black waters:

> Follow flag trail. Cross and skirt break *west*. Norah Cutting to St. Mary's, Nome. Feed the dogs.
>
> O'Connor, U. S. M. S.

Nothing could have been more explicit to direct any person who might have found him if O'Connor had fallen on the way. The guiding angel certainly had been good to the heroic Miles, for to no other place along the Behring coast could he have come, where such complete facilities to care for him and hastily equip a relief expedition were always at hand.

Soon the barracks' horses were ringing with their winter bells, lanterns were flashing, commands were sung out as the post dories

were skidded to the bobsleds and packed with all necessary paraphernalia for the night's rescue work.

When the frost had been drawn from Miles' feet and hands and the face patches were thawed, Dr. Jerauld gave him a sleeping potion, and after swathing his whole body in oils and soft cotton, had him put to bed. The doctor then hurried to accompany the relief corps.

Lieutenant Hutchinson, who assumed command, took nothing upon himself in the laying-out of their travelling course; he carried out the instructions of the note to the letter. In packing he included a bundle of dried salmon for the dogs, although he knew that a dog man like the Fish River mail carrier would never be without food for his team.

Almost immediately after the Master had left the dogs they set up their chorus—their infinite-reaching wolf-call—and fixed their exact location for any living thing that might be within its great radius. Norah's heart beat with admiration for them. She realised that each one knew the predicament in which they were caught.

When the leaden shades of night fell, she set

fire to the flambeau that Miles had arranged. She could not suppress a tear when she saw that it was made of one of her beloved's fur mittens soaked in seal oil. Immediately the torch flared up a bright beacon. As she shoved it clear of the sleigh she prayed that its glow might be seen by whomever came to save them.

She pictured Miles in the water, trying frantically to scale the icy wall on the other side. Then for a horrible second she saw him sink back to the treacherous depths. She closed her eyes and wished at that instant to die and join him at the gates of heaven. She beseeched the saints to watch over him—'twas always he: she prayed for nothing for herself. Her soul mingled with the ceaseless wail of the faithful malamutes; she merged her lament with theirs, breathing God's name and ever seeing her crusader flying at the head of great banked clouds.

He carried something in his outstretched arms. Away in the radiant distance she beheld the glorious throne to which Miles was flying—and in his arms she saw that she—she herself—was rapturously reclining.

Norah wakened to hear a new note in the calling of the dogs. She managed to lift herself

and see that they were all on their feet and giving forth half joyous yelps far different from the supplicating tones she heard before she fell into her dream. She heard the patter of running feet; a cheer rang in her ears; and then—merciful angels be praised—a man was speaking her name!

"Miss Cutting! I am Doctor Jerauld, of Fort Davis, and here is Lieutenant Hutchinson. And now you're to take this medicine——"

"Miles——" Norah faltered.

"He's all right."

"There is a God, Doctor!"

The girl drank the draught and closed her eyes to rejoice and sing high praise.

From the malamutes the officer and men could not restrain their caresses. They fell on the whole team and gave each of the dogs a good hug, which was received understandingly. Champion beasts they were and they knew it, each where he had been left, in the traces of duty, to starve and die there if need be.

When next Norah opened her eyes she found herself in the most wonderful of fleecy quilted beds. She heard the soft tones of a high-bred woman's voice: "Sweet child," it said, "how you have slept. Come now, open your eyes. See!

The storm's all blown away and the sun is shining just for you, I know."

"Oh, I've been so peacefully sleeping," Norah said, "or am I still dreaming? Are you real?"

Mrs. Jerauld touched Norah's hands and tenderly stroked her forehead. "Yes, I am real," she said, "and you are to rest here until you are fine and strong again."

"Miles—where is Miles?" Norah asked.

"He is in the Doctor's room. After you've been all prettied up, if you can stand to see him dressed up like Santa Claus, we'll bring him to you."

"Doc," Miles was saying to the post surgeon the next morning, "how is she?"

"All O. K., O'Connor. She's a little beauty, and she'll get well, old boy, be sure of that. She's got blood and fire in her heart, O'Connor. We'll win out sure. I wish that we could keep her here in the post hospital—or right here in the house—Grace would love to mother her."

"She niver had a mother, Doc. But Bennett Cutting, her auld man, he's been father and mother to her for these manny years. The auld fellow's not got all the spare cash in the world—

but at that he's spinding his lasht ounce to put Norah in the healthy clear.

"Say, Doc,"—an enlightened look suffused O'Connor's eyes as they shone through the cotton bandages—"I'm in the government service, as you know—now isn't there something about medical attintion for all government employees and their families—to be had here free gratis for nothing, Doc?"

"There is, O'Connor. Why?"

"That's what I thought. Now will you let me slip into the room where Norah is, if she's so that she can stand the shock of all this divilish cotton embroidery I have on me face? I can walk all hunkie-dorrie. Sure, what's a little frosht! It was lack of wind that floored me."

Miles scuffed along behind the Doctor as briskly as his stinging feet permitted. At the door of her room he called: "Norah, shut your eyes, darling. I look like a scarecrow."

"It's all right; come in," she responded. But this time she utterly disregarded orders, and rather than close her eyes she lifted them to him with the age-old mystery of the world shining brightly through glistening tears. With outstretched arms she waited for his coming, and then at last for an

ecstatic minute she held her man-god to her heart.

And then, exalted with his wonderful happiness, O'Connor turned to the Doctor and his wife: "Sind to Nome for Father Van and Bishop Rowe, Doc. They're me two greatest frinds, and although they're both at the head of different churches, still—praise be—they're both strong for the wan God."

It was indeed a gorgeous home-coming for Bennett Cutting when the first up-river packet brought back his daughter. She had the rose of the sinking sun in her cheeks and the laughter of the racing streams in her eyes as she rushed to her father's arms.

"Didn't I tell ye, sir," said the radiant O'Connor, standing at her side, "that Norah was to hold my chances of loife and Paradise as long as she was under the care that you gave her up to? That in the hollow of her hand she carried everything that I held sacred? Well, Mr. Cutting, I propose now that we pool our happiness: it's you and me for Norah until we drain the lasht drop of our blood living for her."

THIS AIMS TO BE A DOG COUNTRY

HE STOOD FACING THE JURY AS IF CHALLENGING THEIR HONEST JUDGMENT.
[*See page* 119]

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THIS AIMS TO BE A DOG COUNTRY

BY COMMON consent the day of the trial was declared a holiday in Nome.

That meant there was *some* excitement. For it was in the fall, at the very height of the season when everything is bustle and hustle.

It was at the time when thousands who come in just for the few months are preparing for their winter outside, and the mercantile companies are rushed to death and every one, in short, is supremely busy.

But this trial involved a row between the sheep men and the dog men of the North country, and Nome wouldn't miss anything in that line for all the business bustle in the universe. Besides, it was to be a battle royal between the stinging bar-

battler, Ira Orton and Lawyer Fink, a slick legalite from Tennessee with a little Blue Grass on the side—Fink of the silvery throat and the sheet-iron lining. Nome knew what those could do to each other—they'd done it so very often.

"Funny how that little imp Orton and me are always fighting each other," said Fink to a bunch of the boys a few days before the trial. "Every time I frame a lawsuit against the Pioneer or the Haig and Haigsons or the White and Blacks or any of them outfits that I have been fighting for the last three years, I no sooner get my canvas set and get squared away for a pretty court battle than I always feel something like a cockle-burr in between my pelt and my collar, and that usually means that you can bet an ounce of Ophir dust against a hole in a California sinker that I'm going to have my learned confrere, Ira Orton, lined up against me on the other side."

But this was to be more than the usual encounter. For one thing, Fink himself was the defendant as well as the lawyer for the defence. Action had been brought by the Pacific Cold Storage Company, Charles LaFarge manager, and Fink was required to show cause why he should not be made to pay the plaintiff the sum of four

hundred and twenty dollars and the costs of the action, this being the market valuation of twenty-eight head of prime sheep owned by the aforesaid company and slain by a white, black-streaked malamute called "Peg," who was the property of the defendant.

There you are! In the last analysis, it was Peg who was the defendant. That was enough for Nome.

On Tuesday, the day of the trial, all the space between the court-house door on Steadman Avenue and the rail that separates litigants, criminals, court attendants, witnesses, lawyers and other miscellany necessary to the process of justice, from the spectators and the panel summonses, was jammed as full of interested humanity as fifteen by twenty feet of boards could be.

Outside the door the crowd surged about like a heard of milling cattle, going round and round in a circle which gradually became so strenuous that Jordan's "Haven of Rest" caught quite a little overflow of the exhausted.

Within the rail, against the table before the judge's platform, were squeezed LaFarge and Orton at one end—the end nearest the jury-box—while at the other, in saturnine complacency, sat

the sable-maned owner of Peg, slayer of cold-storage sheep. At his right, with his head so close to Fink's that you couldn't have slipped a bill between them, sat Till Price, a copper-tanned youth looking as consciously sweet as a coy Eskimo belle.

Peg had been sort of boarding with Till, at the ditch camp of the Pilgrim River Mining Company, of which he was manager, when the tragedy happened. Peg and he were old friends; so were Peg and his trail dogs, especially the magnificent "Grey Cloud"; and Fink had sent his dog out to live a while at Till's camp, which camp lay very near to the slopes of the Sawtooth Range, used as a grazing range by the Pacific Cold Storage Company aforesaid.

In the judge's chair sat Tom Reed, judge of the United States Commissioner's Court—in fact, U. S. C. himself. He tilted his chair against the wall, occasionally mangling a good-sized plug and listening passively to Fred Cowdin calling the names of the first twelve to file up and into the jury-box.

The names sounded like concentrates of the blue bloods of Seward peninsula: Bill Bunger, Gabe Price, Chris Tremper, Jack Leedy, Louis Lane,

L WAVING, HE WENT OVER AND SNIFFED IN FRIENDLY FASHION AT
E JUDGE'S ANKLES. [*See page* 119]

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Frederick Hanks, Tapioca Hoggatt, Gus Sieffert, and so on. And the commotion this noisy dozen made in working their way up through the solid jam to the box was like the breaking up of an old building.

Then came the reading of the complaint.

Immediately after, Ira Orton pounced on Bill Bunger, the first man in the box.

"Bill, do you know anything about this case?"

"No." Bill looked bored, as though he smelled something—or had a little bunch of snow piled up on the end of his nose.

"Do you know the defendant, Albert Fink?"

"Yes."

"Do you know the dog Peg—property of Albert Fink?"

"Sure I do."

"Does Albert Fink owe you any money?"

"Yes."

"Do you think that that fact will prejudice you in any way for or against any of the parties interested in this action?"

"No."

"Pass the juror."

"Gabe," followed up Orton quickly, "Till's your brother, isn't he?"

"Yes, Ira."

"Would that in any——"

"Aw *no!*"

"Pass the juror."

"Gabe's satisfactory to us," contributed Fink, with a broad Blue-Grass smirk.

"Chris"—Orton resumed his examination—"do you know of any reason why you couldn't sit on this case as a fair and impartial juror?"

"No."

"Do you know Finky's mutt Peg?"

"Hold on, Chris!" bellowed Fink. "Your Honour, I object to having the grandest old trail dog in all Alaska referred to in this courtroom or anywheres in this whole blooming land as a mutt! Ira, I'll smash your glasses if you say that again, you measly little toy terrier, you!"

"You can't do it, you black and tan swamp hound," returned Ira.

The rear of the courtroom burst out into loud haw-haws, relayed out to Steadman Avenue, where a boisterous bunch of the "Haven of Resters" handed it back.

Tom Reed, U. S. C., rapped smartly for order; and when he finally got it Chris Tremper answered Orton's last question.

"Yes, I know Peg."

"Do you like him?"

Chris shifted his fat, good-natured weight from one foot to the other, and hesitated. "No, not particular like," he drawled, looking the picture of guilt; "I'm not so stuck on old Peg."

Quick as a trap Orton was on his feet. "I challenge the juror." And almost as fast Fink had sprung up to "object."

"Challenge sustained," ruled Judge Tom Reed, U. S. C., without ever stopping his chewing "Mr. Tremper, you're excused!"

As Chris clumped down from the box, behind his hand he whispered—*he* would have called it a whisper—to the defendant: "I tried my damnedest, Finky."

Judge Tom Reed heard him, of course. "What do you mean, Mr. Tremper?" he demanded.

But the courtroom had heard him too, and let loose again, clear out to the gang in the street. Chris escaped while the judge was rapping order back into the bedlam.

So the quizzing went on, with stout denials of prejudice. Freddie Hanks even claimed that he could be fair-minded despite the fact that Peg had once caught Freddie's deer-skin breeches between

his teeth and got a taste of his blood—blood which Freddie lost no chance of explaining he came by through the union of Abraham Lincoln and Nancy Hanks. And at last the twelve were chosen and sardined into the box.

The first witness called to the stand for the plaintiff was the sheep-herder on the Sawtooth Range at the time of the tragedy to the twenty-eight sheep. He was a long-drawn-out, bent-in-the-middle young man, whose towering personality suggested homespun and long-barrelled turkey rifles. After he had taken the oath and folded himself into the witness chair, he peered at the judge, furtive and frightened.

"What's your name, young man?" Ira Orton began smooth and soft, as if to check-mate the attack of stage fright which seemed imminent in his star witness.

"Piney Jackson, suh."

"What's your business, Piney?"

"Tendin' sheep."

"Who for, Piney?"

"Mr. LuhFahge."

"Piney, do you remember what happened to your flock on the morning of the tenth of August of this year?"

"Yes, suh. A dawg came hellbent inta the bunch 'n' kilt a right smart er them."

"What do you mean—'a right smart'?"

"Well, suh, when I could get to count them there was twenty-eight of 'em daid."

"Weren't you armed, Piney?"

"Shuh, suh, I was heeled—I had a rifle."

"Will you please state for the benefit of the jury why it was that you didn't shoot this dog when you saw him attacking the sheep?"

"Well, suh, he was so busy among 'em that I couldn't tell which was sheep and which was dawg. He shuh was a fast workuh. I was 'fraid I'd plug a sheep er two instead of the dawg."

"Do you know who owns that dog?"

"No, suh; but I seen him with Mr. Price a right smart of times, suh."

"Would you know that dog if you saw him here in the courtroom?"

"Yes, suh."

"Your Honour, I ask that the malamute dog Peg be produced to establish this ownership."

Fink was on his feet instantly at this, and said that he admitted the relation of ownership. Peg's appearance at this time would have materially interfered with his plan of defence.

Orton chuckled and sat down satisfied, looking cunningly over his glasses at the jury. Then, turning to Piney, he said: "That's all, young man, unless Mr. Fink wishes to cross-examine you."

"Piney?" questioned Fink, purring like a Persian. "You say you couldn't bring yourself to shoot at Peg for fear of hittin'—remember Tennessee and Blue Grass—a *sheep?*"

"Yes, suh, Mr. Fink."

"Thank you, Piney. I see you know me. What part of the South do you come from, Piney?

"Kentucky, suh, Mr. Fink."

"Indeed! Not Jefferson County, by any chance?"

"Why, yes, suh—Crescent Hill."

"Here! Here!" (a rude interruption from Ira Orton) "Crescent Hill's a he——" (rap from Judge Reed) "pardon, your Honour's a long way from the question at hand."

"Continue, Mr. Fink," ordered the Judge.

"Thank you, your Honour"—suave stuff from Finky.

"Now, Piney, I was *raised* in Crescent Hill."

"Your Honour!" warned Orton.

"Mr. Fink, I admonish you."

"Oh, pardon, Tom—your Honour. It *is* quite unusual, though, you'll admit."

At about this stage of the proceedings the high lights about the visage of Charley LaFarge were taking on the glow of an Italian sunset. But of course Fink never noticed.

"Now, Piney," he resumed, "you say you were afraid to aim at a *dawg* for fear of hitting a *sheep*"—the way he said this made Piney wriggle. "Looks as if they must have been pretty well mixed up, Piney. Now, tell me this: *how could you be sure which was attacking, sheep or dog?*"

Fink shot the question at him, with his jaw thrust out. And Piney simply hung his mouth open, and stared.

Finky took his advantage. "You don't answer me, Piney. I assume that you can not. But tell me this: was Peg, or wasn't he, limping and bleeding after his battle with the wild rams and ramesses?"

"No, suh, Mr. Fink, I didn't see him limpin'," said Piney, almost apologetic, "but he shuh was some bleedin'."

"Thank you, Piney. That's all."

"Jackson," interjected Orton, as Piney was slinking off the stand, "couldn't you see that that was sheep's blood on the blood-thirsty brute?"

"No suh, sheep's blood and dawg blood is all the same to me, suh—Paig shuh was a-bleedin'; I knows that, suh."

"That's all; you're excused. You may go." And in his mind Ira mentioned the place that Piney could go to.

Charley LaFarge then took the stand and merely stated facts—cold ones.

Twenty-eight sheep had been killed. They were an absolute loss to the company of four hundred and twenty dollars, figuring at the market rate of fifteen dollars per head. They were not even mutton. For unless a sheep hangs and drains properly after slaughtering, it is not fit to eat. So the twenty-eight were nothing but pelts. And Mr. Fink's dog Peg had done it.

No questions from Mr. Fink, and the plaintiff rested.

In rebuttal Fink called Mr. Tillman Price to the stand and asked him to state to the jury just what had happened on the Pilgrim ditch-line on the morning of the tenth day of August of that year.

"Do you mean with Peg and the sheep, Albert?" Till's voice was like velvet; soft, limpid, and innocent of guile—oleomargarin wouldn't have melted in his pie-trap.

"Yes."

"Well, gentlemen," Till began, "Albert Fink here sent Peg out to me 'long in July and asked me to take care of him. Peg and I have always been good friends, and he likes my team dogs, too, so I said: 'Sure, Finky, send the old scout right out.'

"Every morning Peg used to trail at the side of my horse while I made the trip along the ditch line to see how the boys were doing their work.

"Now there were plenty of dogs out there besides my string, and it seems that almost every one of them had made up his mind to jump Peg at the slightest provocation, or I should say, lack of provocation, because Peg certainly is a peaceful champion. Gentlemen, I never saw a hair ruffled on Peg yet; and though I never saw him fail to lick any dog that jumped him—also by the same sign *Peg never jumped a dog first!*

"He was always on the defensive, never the offensive.

"Now on the morning that the sheep jumped

him"—it must be said for Till that he coloured a bit as he said this; that is, a sort of deep carmine seemed to surge into the copperish tan which lay thick on his face—"I noticed particularly that he was nosing up in the air all the time; his two ears pointed skyward, and every guard-hair stood on edge like the ridge fur of a lynx. I couldn't imagine what it meant; I sniffed the air myself, but I couldn't catch any strange smells. But, gentlemen, you know malamutes are uncanny, so I says to him, 'Peg, what's up?'

"Well, he just come up to me and he was whimpering like he's scared to death. His tail dropped and his ridge hair fell all of a sudden; and all the time he's crying as though he's expecting to be murdered any minute.

"Then he smells the air again, and he sneaks off over a little hog-back on the Pilgrim. I called to him, but he didn't turn or make as though he heard me at all.

"It wasn't fifteen minutes before I heard a man yelling and crying—just raising the deuce generally, and I struck out in the direction that Peg took when he slunk away from me. Down in the valley on the other side of the hog-back I saw a big bunch of sheep, and right in the middle of

it was a terrible commotion. The herder was trying to get in and separate the fighting rams and the infuriated ewes, and they all seemed to be trying to annihilate Peg, who was right there in the thick of it. Before I could get down to rescue him, he managed in some miraculous way to escape, and I hiked back to the ditch.

"When I saw him at camp his right ear—remember, gentlemen, how I'd noticed those two fine, upstanding ears when he was sniffing his enemies before the battle—was now hanging down, badly bitten through and through! He had other marks on his head, too, and he was dripping blood from his mouth where a ram's horn had cruelly lacerated him."

Finky began to sniffle here, and Bill Bunger blew his nose.

"He showed, in short, every sign of having been attacked by overwhelming numbers. And, gentlemen,"—my, but Till was dignified and impressive!—"as I never knew of Peg to start a fight in his life, I knew that he couldn't have started this one."

And Till sat down.

There was a long moment of silence in the courtroom. The crowd was flabbergasted by

Till's sublime nerve. Then Tom Reed came down on his front chair-legs with a thud.

"Take the witness, Mr. Orton," he said in a dry tone.

"God forbid!" gasped Ira.

Whereupon Fink rose and impressively began: "Your Honour, and gentlemen of the jury, I had it in mind to tell you more about Peg—about his reputation for peace and quiet, and his magnificent record as king of the Alaskan trails, a record undisputed except perhaps by Till Price's' Grey Cloud. I was going to ask you if you thought such a dog as that would stoop to kill *sheep!*"—Again the poisonous inflection on the word.—"But, gentlemen, I have changed my mind. I will tell you only what Peg has suffered. Peg, gentlemen, was a dog of absolutely unblemished form until these cowardly—I repeat it, *cowardly*—sheep spoiled his regal splendour—I might say his dog-gone beauty. He had not the slightest scratch or mar until his return from the Pilgrim—he was as sound as an Iron Creek nugget when he went out there. And what do I get back? What do I receive into my kennels?

"Why, a poor old broken-down dog with his weather lug half torn off and lopping over like

a torn dish-rag—no more of that perky stand it used to have; a look in his eye that means loss of memory and a general aspect of something loony and God forsaken that just makes me sick, that's all!

"I might better have kept him here in Nome, where at least he'd be free from the danger of being attacked by a bunch of angry sheep! Yes, gentlemen, you have heard Till Price tell it; you have seen Piney unable to deny it; LaFarge's sheep just charged my Peg and pretty near got him, too. Why should I be made to suffer monetary loss because my great malamute repelled the bloodthirsty attack of these sheep?—because the plaintiff's untamed mutton disfigured my dog? Isn't that enough?

"But, gentlemen, the money is but incidental—not the paramount issue. Vindication for my Peg is what I want! I want his name to stand clear in the records of Alaska. Therefore, gentlemen, I am going to have Peg produced here in the courtroom; and if, after viewing him, you are of a mind to brand him a marauding killer of sheep, I shall gladly pay the amount demanded in this action."

Orton had got his wind again. "Your Honour,"

he protested, "I object to the dog's appearance in the courtroom at this time. Your Honour will recall that I asked earlier to have the dog brought in——"

"Objection overruled, Mr. Orton. Produce the dog!" yawned Tom Reed.

Peg could be heard scratching upon the door of the adjoining room, where Finky had had him brought to await his entrance cue.

When his master stepped to the door and opened it the malamute high-stepped into the court-room, head and tail erect—a proud, grand patriarch of the Arctic trails.

Majestically Peg surveyed the crowd, one ear cocked up and imperial, the other dropped over and crestfallen, like the languishing comb of a sick rooster. He was indeed battle-scarred, this monarch.

He nuzzled his master affectionately and then stalked over to the jury-box and sniffed a welcome to Bill Bunger. Bill snapped his fingers and Peg mounted with forepaws to the box rail, then, balancing himself with one paw, he stretched the other out toward Bill in whimsical playfulness. And all the while his tail wagged in brisk delight.

He then stood at absolute immobility, facing the jury as if challenging their honest judgment, and Albert Fink, overcome by joy in the possession of such a monarch, ingenuously rested his case with the dog men on the jury.

"Gentlemen of the jury," he said simply, "is Alaska a dog country or a sheep country? Look at my star wheeler—look at Peg—look at that ear mangled by murderous mutton—look at his eyes, his noble head. Gentlemen—choose."

In deep silence Fink sat down, and Tom Reed turned to charge the jury. He attracted Peg's attention, and the dog abandoned the jurors in favour of the judge. Tail waving again, he went over and sniffed in friendly fashion at his ankles, then flung himself thunderously across the judge's feet, looking up with confident expectation of a response.

The Judge's hand started down toward him, then drew back. Apparently he wanted to avoid any demonstration that might be construed as biased.

So, accordingly, he adjusted his glasses a bit nearer the jumping-off place on his nose and informed the jurymen that the case was now entirely in their hands, bidding them repair to the lean-to

attached to the court building, which served as the jury room.

Precisely at this moment there came sounds of baa-baa-ing through the open window, only an arm's length from where the U. S. C. sat—and close upon these gutturals the dub-dub-dub of hundreds of little hoofed feet.

LaFarge was the only man present whose face did not show inquisitive concern.—"My sheep coming in from the mountains to go into the long chill," he whispered to Ira Orton.

Instantly Peg let out an unearthly wail, putting the fear of Hades into the soul of every one in the courthouse. The passion of all his wolf ancestors—his sheep-hating, sheep-killing ancestors—rung in that cry. Finky and Till both knew what it meant, and Finky made a lunge for him and grabbed him by the scruff of the neck. Then, before the malamute could let out another wail, he dropped down beside him and threw his arms around Peg's neck, holding the struggling dog with a grip of iron.

"Poor old Peg," he comforted, "don't be afraid. I won't let the old sheep hurt you."

A titter broke out in the front of the courtroom, and spread back to the door, growing into

a roar of laughter as it went. The U. S. C. brought his gavel down with a smart thwack, looking stern. Finky glanced up from his wriggling armful of dog, pained and innocent. The foreman of the jury gave a glance at Peg, and fairly hustled the jurors out to their lean-to. "Come on, boys, let's get this job finished."

And when the sheep had baa-baa-ed and dub-dubbed out of hearing, Finky released the quivering Peg, with a last pat of reassurance. . . .

A scant ten minutes later Tom Reed gnawed a chunk out of his tobacco plug and rapped for order and reconvention of the most honourable court. The jurors filed in and sat down—some of them wiping their chops with the backs of their hands and filling the room with the odour of copper-distilled heaven's dew from Kentucky. From the hand of Tapioca Hoggatt fluttered a verdict form duly filled in.

As if he knew he was the real defendant, Peg stood up and wagged a friendly tail at the jury.

The U. S. C. stopped chewing long enough to ask: "Agreed on a verdict, boys?"

"We are," admitted Tapioca, and, rising, he read as follows:

"We the jury impanelled in the case of the

Pacific Cold Storage Company *versus* Albert Fink of the city of Nome, Alaska, find that twenty-eight sheep, the value of which the plaintiff sought to recover, came to their death at the hands—or teeth—of the defendant's malamute dog Peg, who *acted purely in self-defence.*

"The jury recommends that *this aims to be a dog country.*"

BETCHER-BOOTS

VI

BETCHER-BOOTS

I

MALAMUTES are peculiar creatures. They have characteristics that are as unalterably pronounced as are the antics of, say, the mule, the chicken, or the mongoose.

Just so sure as a mongoose will kill a snake, as a chicken will cross the road, and a mule will at some unforeseen time suddenly take root on a turnpike—just so sure will a malamute come to love but one man. It is a love that endures. The trailer may have other owners, masters or drivers, but he loves but one. At some time in the life of the dog he forms his grand attachment, and no welding at white heat can hold stronger.

Barney may not be eligible for the foregoing qualifications, because they fit the pure malamute; but if the tawny trail dog were entered and benched in the malamute classes it would take a shrewd judge indeed to note that Barney in one or two infinitesimal points slanted back to a maternal ancestor who came to Nome in the summer of nineteen hundred as cattle-dog-in-chief to a drove of Texas long-horn steers.

Barney first saw the light of day under "the Senator's" work-bench, in the cook- and mess-tent of the "Twenty-seven" Ophir Creek hydraulic crew. His mother—not the Senator's—had been sharp-shooting from the Blue Goose workings, where Ophir cataracted into the Neukluk, all the way up stream, taking in all stops, until along the first part of August she sniped her way into the Senator's world of pots, pans and cleavers—ten good miles from where she had started when the sluicing water began running in June.

As far as known, Barney's mother had no other name but the casual one she may have acquired at her last stopping place. At "Fifteen," the main camp of the Wild Goose Company, Harry Leland dubbed her "Bum"; at "Nineteen," where the clean-up crew scuffed ankle-deep in pure gold,—

yes, and in a four-foot sluice bottom at that—"Bum" was changed to "Swipes."

Cooks were blind to her beautiful wolf markings or ignorant of her perfect breeding conformation; and the winter trailmen who saw in her a breeder of sweep-stake speeders were too busy in the rush and hustle of a fleeting open-spell to take any time from their duties to house or care for the sleek roving malamute.

But when she shambled her way to "Twenty-seven," the plaint of her eyes and the rolling weight on her slender racy legs were too much for the Senator, and he made her welcome and comfortable right under his nose, in the heavenly atmosphere of simmering soup-stock and boiling meat. Again her name changed; the Senator christened her "Cleopatra," because, as he said, the gang called him a "mark" for letting her run him the way she did.

Well, along they came: three little girlie puppies and Barney, the only irregularly marked one of the litter; he was a tan. The cattle-herder no doubt had made a profound impression on Barney's great-great-grandfather, because here she was, in colour at least, four generations past, plastered all over what promised to be a dog that

would pile up a mark for trail conquests that the dog-men of Alaska would be shooting at for some time to come.

When the pups began to show their cuteness and inclination to romp and play, a lot of queer things happened in the "Twenty-seven" mess-tent. Beans were served well sugared instead of salted. A big bowl of delicious curried rice was given to the men—only the curry was mustard! The tea-pot contained pure hot water. It was evident that the Senator had things to attend to that interfered seriously with the job he was getting seven and a half a day for. Many of the slant-headed pit-men ate the Senator's mistakes and lunged back for more—they had weird stomachs, some of those shovel stiffs.

In the middle of September the girl doggies were stricken one after the other with a deadly scourge of the Arctic dogs, and the Senator—poor soul—in his ignorance could do nothing to check its fatal ravage. So, rather than have some one bitten and perhaps poisoned, Cleopatra's female progeny were released to the infinite reaches of the Dog Heaven, each with the aid of a forty-four slug for its little malamute soul. Cleopatra and the Senator were dejected, but they did manage to

extract some solace from the care and nursing bestowed upon the sisterless Barney. The distemper seemed to skip him entirely. He was just a hale, healthy cub, the one of the proverbial four that the plague did not attack. It may have been that tough buck-skin strain that told in him.

One evening, at about the time of long shadows, Wolf Ladue stopped before the tent door. Barney recoiled with his back to the door, every hair on edge, as if sensing something unclean and menacing in the sinister figure that eyed him with covetous appraisal. With Ladue were five heavily laden dogs—each wearily pack-saddled and looking worn and hungry. 'Twas plain that they had a hard summer instead of the well-earned rest to which they were entitled after a long winter of sled-trailing.

Wolf was a tough man. He was notorious as a brutal dog puncher. Of the usual prospectors' pack-saddle he had none; the dogs did all of his packing! His entire burden consisted of a vicious-bitted black-snake with a loaded handle which swung sashlike across his chest. Not one of his miserable dogs was innocent of its bite or scar.

The Senator, being a summer bird of passage,

as those are termed who do not face the rigours of the Arctic winter, saw naught in Wolf Ladue but a man who knew and understood the northern dogs; he knew nothing of the infamy which the mention of the name Wolf Ladue suggested to all of the pioneers and sour-doughs of the entire Council City district; so he poured out the lament of his heart in the telling of the extermination of the little sick cubs.

Wolf hearkened with narrowing eyes when the Senator told of his apprehension regarding Barney. "What should I do to be sure that Barney won't get caught like the rest of the pups? What precautions shall I take?"

"Give him to me," said Wolf. "I'll take him down to my camp on Dutch Creek and dope him so's he'll never go nuts and you'll have a good dog; then I'll bring him back to you in about ten days and he'll be all O. K. for the big hike I suppose you'll be taking to Seattle and the outside."

"Gee, that's the way to talk. Say, mister, you make a big hit with me; take him along; I'm worried sick about that Barney. I tell you wot, I'm so stuck on him that I'm not so sharp for taking him out, because I've heard that these malamutes don't live outside. So if you cure him or fix him

up so that he won't get it, you keep him! That's how much I love that pup: I'd rather see him in a good home, which I can't give him, than have him myself and have him go 'bats' or somethin'."

And in this manner Barney passed from the kindest pilgrim in the North to the ownership of the meanest man permitted to breathe its pure air. But the pup felt no particular pang at the parting from the Senator; after all, there was nothing that the camp cook did particularly to endear the little fellow to him. At Barney's age the food was of more importance to him than where it came from or who fed it to him. Had he also contracted the disease that did for his sisters, and had the Senator nursed him through a three weeks' or a month's siege of sickness, Barney would have formed his first real attachment, no doubt. But the first real thrill that Barney had experienced so far was the negative one that overwhelmed him at sight of Wolf Ladue. And now he knew that the fear he felt in his little being for the man who carried him was not without foundation. He sensed that the flinty tone in the voice of Ladue was intended as a rebuke for something he had done; what that thing was, of course Barney knew not. But he did know that he was being abused.

Before Wolf had reached his camp on Dutch Creek he had begun to torment and torture the tawny ball of fur that reposed in timid excitement in the bend of his arm. The other dogs of the pack-string were curious and lagged behind, sniffing at their driver's burden. For this presumption on their parts the black snake would unfold and cut its venomous way to their hides, usually with an accompanying curse that stung far deeper than the leather.

"Git on, you! Wotcher hangin' back, for, hey? Go on, you Prince——" Prince had stopped to lick a bleeding foot, had just settled down under his bulging saddle bags when—*swish*—*bang*—like the crack of a rifle the rawhide tongue cut his back with cruel precision. Prince struggled to his feet and plodded on, crying pitifully. "Hey, you, Buck," yelled Wolf, "git on or I'll slap it to you too."

Then Barney came in for a savage shake. "Say, you purp, you're beginning to raise Cain around here already. Well, I'll cure you of any chance to go dips; you just won't have time to think of the bat route. I'm a-goin' to shape you for the winter so's you kin pull alongside of the rest of them."

So before Barney had time to think of becoming ill, he found that all of his spare time and attention, and a great deal of energy, were centered on a broad webbed breast-plate, with understraps which met immediately under his tiny chest and diverged from there upwards to the ridge of his spine. At this point a big metal swivel-snap dug into his bones more and more, according to the effort Barney put forth to free himself of it. But worst of all was the iron pick-head that dragged along behind him wherever he went, and if perchance, as often happened, it got caught on a rock or a willow stump, the pup's anguish, as it tried frantically to free itself, was pathetic. Wolf stood by, watching the twisting and straining puppy at these times, swinging the black-snake and adding further torment by saying, "That'll learn you to always think of pullin,' you little devil. There's only one thing I want from you, young feller, and that's work; see, work!"

The spirit in the growing dog was hard to down, however determined Ladue was to break it. Barney made a friend of Chief—a big black-and-white wheeler—and even though handicapped by the drag weight, the pup managed to infect the old veteran of the trail with his prank-

ish spirit until he permitted himself to be rolled over on his back and played horse with, for the young malamute.

In January news came to Council City of a big gold strike in the Kugruk River district. It was a well authenticated report. All who could—and several who couldn't—equipped themselves for the two-hundred-mile journey to the ice-bound coast of Kotzebue Sound. The trail led through the dreaded Death Valley of Seward Peninsula, up to the headwaters of the Kewalick River, thence down to Candle City and from there either across the Virginia Creek cut-off, or down to the Sound by a direct line to Moran's roadhouse, which marked the Kotzebue shore on a spit dividing the Sound from Kewalick Lagoon.

Ladue was one of the most feverish of the stampeders. He could live on practically nothing, and he was of the type that expected the same from his dogs. From them he exacted most unreasonable efforts; in return he gave them cruelty and next to nothing to eat. They seldom received cooked food from him. 'Twas only when a stop was made at some Indian or Eskimo camp that the Ladue dogs knew the ecstasy of boiled

fish or meat. There it was fed them with the other dogs as a matter of course.

By this time Barney, although only half grown, was a beautiful upstanding specimen of the Arctic trail dog. At the stand he was a superb picture, well muscled, front legs close together, his padded feet set as a ballet dancer poised before a terpsichorean flight. His head he held erect, with snapping eyes and pointed ears alert and unafraid—except when Ladue came near him. His back was well furred and short coupled; it was almost completely covered by the rich brush which folded close over it when he was in high humour, or drooped, touching the ground, when he was fear-stricken. This latter condition of Barney's brush was rare, however; usually it was rampant, in perpetual evidence that his riotous soul fire burned undimmed, notwithstanding a hard master.

Barney, being the sixth in the string, was placed between the swing and wheel team, making really the breast team, or part of it. Technically, in the language of Alaskan dog-punchers, Barney was half a breast team. Owing to his immaturity, he was really but a quarter of this unit of Northern hitching. He was completely swivelled as to har-

ness. No matter how he jumped from side to side or rolled when the string stopped, he always fetched up in the clear and could not possibly become entangled in the tugging gear.

His training with the pickhead drag stood him in good hand now as he raced along to keep free of Chief and Buck, who ever pressed closely at his heels. Often his legs could not keep the pace set by the lead dog; then he would be literally carried along on the taut lead coupling. At these times his heart fluttered in his six-month-old breast as he endeavoured to escape the cut of the black snake which exploded about his ears, almost driving him crazy. He could feel that it was taking the heart out of him. It was breaking him; that's what it was doing—breaking him!

II

One evening as the dropping sun shot its lancing rays across the glistening ice, Betcher-Boots, the Indian-of-all-work of the Nelson camp at Alder Creek, was stirring a great pottage of steaming rice and salmon. A row of white teeth gleamed in a copper face as the boy thought of the crack dogs of his master's team, each with his pan

of savoury food before him after a run up from the new diggings in the Kugruk, about twelve miles from the home camp. Betcher-Boots was in sole charge of the camp. The majestic hush of the North filled his Indian soul as he offered a silent sundown tribute to his gods. He was grateful for the friendship and patronage of Andy Nelson, his chief, and also for Walter Wells, George Hicks, and Jackson Hines, who with Andy maintained a four-cornered partnership and friendship. Betcher-Boots was glad to be the servant and friend of that quartette. And the Indian loved the "ky-moo-gans" individually and collectively, from Casey, the Siberian leader, to Cæsar, the stout wheel dog.

Betcher-Boots was a Northern Indian whose blood was chock full of little electric motors that he held under the most rigid control. He knew that he had them, however. His father, called "Oct-too-kill-a-muck," meaning, Swift and Great, was a warrior of the Shungnaks, an inland tribe of Kobuck Indians whose antecedents dated back to the era when, as adventurous pilgrims, or possibly as exiles from the Orient, they were banished to the far places and walked across the strip of land which then connected the East and the West.

Behring Strait now flows between the hemispheres, having cut a fifty-mile gorge at that identical place. Betcher-Boots was of this stock, another branch of which continued on down the western slopes to settle in the southern latitudes and founded the vast tribes of American Indians.

The son of "Oct-too-kill-a-muck" was called "Sub-choo-ahk" when he came to the Nelson camp. "Bet your boots" were the first English words that he learned, and straightway he was nick-named "Betcher-Boots" by Major William Nelson, U. S. A., the father of Andy.

The Indian's reverie was assailed by the sound of whip-cracking and profanity as a string of plodding dogs swung across his sight, headed for the Kugruk. Five dogs were being goaded on by a riding driver who sat on top of an overloaded basket sleigh, whirling a long whip over the dogs' heads, cursing them as they plunged on. The smell of cooking fish, wafted like a breath of heaven to the dogs' nostrils as they passed the Nelson camp, caused a slight swerve on the "haw" tack. The team moved as one from the trail in the direction of the cabin. They were goaded back to the trail and urged on to their des-

tination. Ordinarily, a voyager caught here at such a time would have made camp for the night, but not so this driver; he was going on through.

Betcher-Boots was impelled to rush after the miserable outfit and offer the hospitality of his master's camp, but recognition of the driver sufficed to stifle this impulse. He would hesitate before bidding Wolf Ladue welcome. Would that he could have taken the dogs in for shelter and comfort, but Wolf—"never; he's a bad one," thought the Indian.

The team and the cursing passed on toward the new diggings. For some time Betcher-Boots kept staring at the spot on the trail where he had first seen the Ladue team; as he looked, he was aware that a tawny, gaunt-looking beast of some sort had entered the orbit of his vision and was standing there sniffing the air and looking at him intently. In the failing light it was not unlike a polar or a grey wolf—the light in which it was seen was weird and prankish. Betcher-Boots ran to the cabin and returned in a second holding a Krag on the beast, which now advanced timidly. Suddenly the Indian dropped the rifle; he recognised a limping, exhausted malamute—half grown, half starved and "all in."

Barney had trailed along behind his team from where he had become dead weight, and had been abandoned by Wolf Ladue to survive or perish as he might. The pup's poor body had been lacerated to the raw in places, and his right hind leg had been so repeatedly struck with the whip that he limped. He had tried the ungovernable temper of Ladue until that fiend had torn him from the breast hitch, and lifting him bodily over his head, hurled him to the frozen trail with a blasphemous prayer that he be dashed to death with the impact.

Barney managed to get to his feet; and knowing no other thing to do, he had followed after the rest of the dogs. Poor thing, he didn't know what it was all about. He thought beating and abuse just part of his every-day life. It was all that he had had in his growing months; he knew naught of the kindness that other dogs received. 'Way back in his hazy memory he had a faint recollection of something which now fleetingly seemed like fairyland: a wonderful furry mother, who had licked and caressed him lovingly; a tall man with an apron smelling always of such wonderful things to eat. Barney remembered that he always wanted to eat that apron—it tasted so good.

So he trailed along alone, dragging on as best he could but dropping ever and ever behind his team-mates. He endeavoured to overtake them; he wanted particularly to catch up with the big black-and-white dog Chief.

Suddenly he came to a full stop; he caught a smell in the air which filled his lungs with a divine aroma from Betcher-Boots' stewing pots. He went to the source of the smells as in a dream. It was the first time in his life that he had ever approached anything alone. He was now on his own. He was coming up on something strange—alone, but it all smelled so good that he presently advanced unafraid.

He saw a dark-skinned figure dressed in furs come to him as he painfully stepped up the incline from the trail he had just left. And then Barney knew something of a sensation which was to him as must be the feelings of the returned prodigal to the sheltering arms of an all-forgiving mother. Barney felt a pair of warm arms around his neck—actually felt his nose being kissed! His head was being crushed almost painfully.

Betcher-Boots lavished upon the stray dog all the affection of one born to be kind to bow-wows. He took Barney into the cabin and dressed the

wounds on the poor body and then gave him a good warm supper.

The pup warmed to Betcher-Boots as the morning glory unbends to the sun. In a week the Indian boy had a one-dog team that for speed and high spirits had no equal in the Arctic. Barney knew the first joy of willing service. He stuck to Betcher-Boots like a shadow, just mortised himself into the scheme of the Indian's life.

Barney's one-dog teaming was more like play than work. He was harnessed in a lone hitch, with a regular single-tree and all, but the low Yukon sleigh had two long rear-extending handle-bars, and between these Betcher-Boots ran and propelled the sleigh, and taught Barney the signals which would make of him a leader of trail dogs. He became a great help in the Nelson camp, making possible the trip to Moran's at Kewalick Spit for mail and provisions, where before, the big team had to be taken from its daily working run to the diggings to do what Barney and Betcher-Boots now did very well.

One day, as the Indian was returning to Alder Creek, he gee'd Barney off the trail to permit a five-dog string to pass. It was Wolf Ladue and his team returning from the Kugruk stampede.

Wolf recognised in the developed brilliant malamute the Barney he had abandoned in just about this same locality six weeks back.

"Hey whoa!" he yelled at the dogs. "Hey whoa" to them was always a welcome command. They dropped in their tracks, steaming and spent.

"Here you, Betcher-Boots, where'd you get that dog? That's my dog! Come here, Barney." Wolf made a dive for the dog, and Barney plunged ahead to the trail in a panic of flight.

Betcher-Boots held back the sleigh and commanded Barney, "Down boy, down." The dog obeyed the voice he had come to adore. Wolf reached down to unhook Barney from his harness, but he had no more than stooped to do so when he felt his air-supply suddenly choked off. Fingers of steel encircled his throat. He straightened up and locked with the powerful Indian boy. Both fell in a fierce, silent struggle to the snow.

Any one but Betcher-Boots no doubt would have relinquished Barney to his old owner. But Betcher-Boots was determined his pet should never return to this man. The Indian had felt that the dog was a cast-off from the Ladue string, because this was not the only case when Ladue had left a

poor, useless animal an outcast on the mid-winter trail.

The fighting blood that so long had lain dormant in Betcher-Boots was suddenly roused to the boiling pitch, every last atom of it. Everything he had ever heard of Wolf Ladue's baseness was true. It was typical of him to want the dog now, although he had beaten Barney to within an inch of his poor life and when the beast could move no more, had thrown him to the mercy of the Arctic. The right of possession had no place in the Indian's thoughts; there could be no justice, white man's or redskin's, that would permit a brute to abandon a dog half dead to the trail and then sanction that man's taking the dog from the one who saved it and brought it back to life again. Indeed no!

Betcher-Boots' grip tightened. The Indian had no idea of giving quarter; or if he did have the merciful inclination, he was past all consideration of it. Wolf's efforts to overcome him were as the futile resistance of a child.

When Betcher-Boots finally arose from the snow, all of Wolf's dogs swung round from the trail. As one dog—rather, as one wolf—they

pounced upon the prostrate form of their tyrant master and began tearing him to shreds.

The Indian saw that they were venting their pent-up rage on a lifeless body. They had all reverted in an instant to their wild wolfish type. Barney cowered at the Indian's heels, whimpering and afraid.

Betcher-Boots beat off the dogs with the loaded end of Wolf's black-snake and lifted their dead master into his own sleigh. He unhooked the Ladue leader and placed Barney in that position, letting the dog he supplanted run free. Attaching his own little Yukon sleigh to the basket sleigh, the Indian retracked to Moran's to give himself up to Judge Soloman, who sat there as United States Commissioner.

Betcher-Boots told a straight-forward story to the Judge, omitting nothing, and next morning when court was called His Honour, from the bench at the "bar" end of Moran's roadhouse, spoke the following words:

"In the matter of the decease and finding of the body of Wolf Ladue, and the bringing in of said body, the Court will state that it has appointed itself administrator of the estate and effects of the deceased and has decreed that the entire trail out-

fit, including six dogs, sleigh, robes, excepting, however, one loaded black-snake whip, shall pass forever, to have and to hold, to that good Indian —although alive—named Sub-choo-ahk and called Betcher-Boots.

"It is further decreed that the said black-snake whip be buried with the body of Wolf Ladue, and may the Good Lord have mercy, Amen."

GREY CLOUD

THE GREY KING TOOK MY FAREWELL CARESS LIKE THE CROWN FIGHTING SON OF A VETERAN DEPARTING ON HIS FIRST CAMPAIGN. [*See page* 167]

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VII

GREY CLOUD

GREY CLOUD had six sisters and never a brother. And when Octtoonah, the Norton Sound Indian who owned Grey Cloud's mother, saw him cuddled up at her side—the only male in the litter—he felt convinced that a great dog had been born into the Arctic.

Directly bred wolf-dogs are all famous in Alaska. Every one has distinguished himself and his master. And Grey Cloud was surely a wolf-dog. His mother was a wolf-dog, and she had disappeared from Octtoonah's camp one night when the timber-wolves were howling. The Indian had shrugged his shoulders and grunted—it was natural, after all, that the dog should go back to her own. But another night, several months later, after he had come in from a round of his

snares and traps, he was overwhelmed to find her returned. She had renounced the pack and come back to her Indian master's camp, to bring into the world her half-wild young. And she was rapturously happy in anticipation of her coming motherhood.

Oh, yes, Grey Cloud was a wolf-dog! And the only male of such a litter was surely destined to kingship among northern dogs.

Octtoonah had promised his choice of the males in the brood to Till Price, his friend at Council City, a hundred miles away. And the word of a North American Indian holds. So, after his first sight of the seven little fluff-balls, nestled beside the ecstatic mother, the Shaktolik set off straightway to tell Price the news.

Immediately Price strung out his dog-team to the long basket-sleigh and followed the Indian back to camp at top gait. He was boyishly excited over the new dog, which he too felt was to be mighty among northern trailers.

What he saw was an active little grey mass of fur—like his six sisters in marking, but of a build that already promised power; the strain of his sire was clearly evident.

"A little cloud of grey you are," murmured

Price, as he played with the pup. We'll show 'em a thing or two when you get a bit bigger. Say, what you'll do to that swing-team, hey, boy!"

Two trips more Price made to see the pup before Octtoonah handed him over with the good-luck wish of the Shaktoliks that no evil spirit might hover near the son of the wolves, nor his master, favoured of the sons of the North. On that return trip Grey Cloud was snugly nestled in the bow of the sleigh, wrapped in the folds of the master's lynx robe; and the master caressed him and cared for him all the long hundred miles.

This was the beginning of the hostility toward him of Whiner and Brownie, Price's star swing-team. Three times they had made the hundred-mile trip—the sleigh light; nothing aboard but dried salmon for them, and the blanket robes and weapons of the master—just so that he might see this little ball of grey fur. And now, as they carried him home, they sensed Price's pride and hope in him; they seemed to realise that he was destined to be their leader.

And they were prepared to make the life of a leader perilous. Old Bob, Price's out-runner leader, who was just about to be pensioned, was the only leader out of four that Whiner and

Brownie had left in peace. The other three Price had found cold and stiff, badly torn about the throat and body, while Whiner and Brownie nursed cut legs and flanks—evidence of their guilt. Old Bob had been safe only because he ran out ahead of the team so far away from the swing-dogs that they were the true leaders, and the jealousy they felt of any dog hitched to the lead-line ahead of them was not aroused.

But the absolute leader of the team—the dog that took first position in the working scheme and first place in the heart of their adored master—such a dog might not live. Whiner and Brownie would plot his destruction.

They were magnificent far-North trail dogs, these two. They were strikingly marked for wolf-dogs, with white on sides and legs, and a wide black ridge from the jet tip of their noses to the silver tip of their bushy tails. Their eyes were a bit more than usually slanted, giving them a look of cunning and craftiness. Brownie, despite his black and white, had been named for his coffee-brown eyes, which at times glowed like goldstones. Lean and powerfully muscled in shoulders and forearms, deep-chested, short-

coupled in the barrels, they were the incarnation of strength and endurance.

Coupled with their power was an exceptional quickness. The rapidity with which they comprehended every move of their driver, sometimes even anticipating his signals, and their quick execution of his commands, made them a star pair. And as for courage on the trail, they would no more shirk, no more relax the close fold of their tails from over their backbones, even in the fiercest blizzard, than they would—abandon a feud.

In Grey Cloud their fiery jealousy found abundant fuel. He was indeed the new leader, and within the first year he was known from John Dexter's to the trading-station at Point Barrow, beloved of all men of the North and all the dogs he had met—except these two.

He had proved his superiority in more ways than one. However swift they were to comprehend and execute Price's orders, Grey Cloud was quicker. He always out-guessed them or manœuvred with just a bit more finesse. At the first two words of the "Come in gee" or "Come in haw" command, he was as lightning to draw a taut lead-line, ready for the word that would tell whether he was to lead the eight dogs behind him to the

back of the sleigh on the right side or on the left. And when the word came he almost shot about, retracking not two feet from the trail he'd just been following. He was easily sovereign of the team; and besides that there was about him some wild suggestion of kingship, too, in the black spruce forests which Whiner and Brownie so dreaded. Grey Cloud, they knew, could lick both of them any time they would attack in open combat; and, watch their chance as they would, they could find no way to outwit him.

Before the end of his first season Grey Cloud realised that not all his mates loved him. As a leader he had no reproaches for his string on the score of working together. And between times, Peg and Dick, the powerful wheelers, and Joe and Saxon, the breast-team, were ready with friendly advances. But Whiner and Brownie, the two who were directly behind him in action, turned surly the minute he offered a friendly sniff or wig-wagged his brush. And the looks these two shot him set tingling in his breast a strange network of sensations which he did not yet understand.

Presently he noticed that the master kept him close by his side all day when not in harness—

and all night, too. At first, as soon as he was unhooked—after he had stood erect with the lead-line bearing off his hitch like a drum-string, until not a dog remained attached to it—the master would chain him to a stake. But now he always led him to the cabin and gave him the freedom of the couch near the open fireplace. Grey Cloud would have preferred the clear of the outside even to the hospitable furs of his master's house; but once when he made this evident, he saw a distressed look on the beloved master's face. Master must have some reason for isolating him from the rest of the team.

But one day Price relaxed his precautions, and Grey Cloud romped out of camp, picked up a ptarmigan scent while cavorting, and was off in a flash on a delightful hunt.

Suddenly, just beyond the timber line, where he had paused with his nose in the air, the white and black swing-malamutes sprang on him. Pounced on him from behind, as they had done with the other hated leaders. Brownie made for his throat. Whiner grappled for the hamstrings.

But Grey Cloud was a different proposition from the assassins' earlier victims. They had taken him off guard, and he was bewildered for

a second. He had not known they hated him this much! But in a flash there came to him the meaning of those strange tingling sensations. They meant the will to fight, the consciousness of power.

His throat was too well guarded with thick fur for Brownie's teeth to penetrate. A wolf-hound would have been dangerous, but not this malamute. So Grey Cloud centred his defence on Whiner—in the haunches he was indeed vulnerable. Wheeling, he sank his tusks into Whiner's back ridge and tossed him over his shoulder as a terrier tosses a rat. And the moment Whiner recovered, he lit out for the cabin, yelling and whining at top pitch—a thoroughly licked dog.

Then Grey Cloud turned his attention to Brownie, pouncing on him like a polar bear on a salmon, and gave him a drubbing that filled the air again with wails. All the way down the hill to the kennels he trickled blood—down to where Whiner lay trying to reach the rent in his back with his tongue.

Hearing the uproar, Price rushed out of the cabin. He understood the situation at a glance, and for a moment he was tempted to go back for his rifle and end once for all these two troublesome

dogs' lives. But, after all, Whiner and Brownie were not exceptional in their jealous hatred. It is almost the rule for high-bred Alaska dogs to hate their leaders. And besides, Grey Cloud was abundantly able to look out for himself.

Grey Cloud, meantime, had abandoned all thoughts of his ptarmigan hunt. He stood quivering with excitement and indignation, hurt to the depths of his friendly dog soul. Why, even now he would fight for Brownie or Whiner against any alien!

Slowly he trailed down the hill till he could see Price bandaging the rents in Brownie's breast. There was a blacksnake on a hook over the couch in the cabin. Grey Cloud had seen it used on these very dogs. Now he felt it would be his turn. The master would know very well who had torn Whiner and Brownie. Stealthily he skirted the cabin, approaching the door on the side farthest from the kennels.

The whipped dogs saw him before Price did, and from the security of their chains and the master's protection they snarled out their hatred. No acceptance of defeat for them. No peace with the victor. The feud was not ended.

Grey Cloud cringed as Price came up to him,

and cowered into the cabin at his master's heels. He knew what was coming. In a moment he would feel the cut of the leather bit across his shoulders. But Price only dropped on the couch and reached out his arms to the dog. Instantly Grey Cloud crushed himself into the master's embrace, licking his hands and face in a transport of gratitude and adoration.

Before a week had passed the two plotters were at it again. They tried to get on friendly terms with Peg and Dick, the giant malamute wheelers, so they could count on their help in despatching the leader. But the wheelers would have none of them. And Grey Cloud, confident now of his powers, strolled about the home camp with a complacency that exasperated the two unendurably.

One night, after a hard day's run that should by rights have left them fagged and spent, they flew at Grey Cloud in blind fury. They did not trouble to catch him off guard this time, and he met them squarely. Again he caught Whiner by the back and again threw him over his shoulder. Then Brownie got the unleashed wrath of Grey Cloud's wild blood. The leader was seeing red now. Blood was what he wanted. His shoulders set in a deadly hunch, every guard hair on

end, the grey-black ridge brush abristle, his tail aloft, he sank his trusks deep into Brownie's throat. Whiner had disappeared. . . .

When the great wolf-dog finally unlocked his jaws and looked on the result of his frenzy—saw the still thing of black and white and red—much red—a wave of fear and horror swept over him.

He could never face the master again.

Already he was moving away from the home cabin, making his way up the incline which leads to the divide between the home valley and the Fish River valley. He fell into the gliding stride of his kind. He was going—he did not know where, but away from the master's frown.

Presently the dark of the timber was past, and the dog came out on the high, open places. On the crest he slackened pace, then came to a standstill and, turning, gave his home a long, sorrowful look of farewell. Then he began the down-grade to the strange valley.

For two days he went forward. He was free, but there was no joy in the return to the wild life of his sires. The love of his master was more to him than title to all these vast stretches of country.

Besides, hunger cut its way into his nerves.

How he missed the juicy salmon that the dear hand had fed him! The boiled rice with bits of bacon in it! In what content he had watched the master as he stirred the pot and tasted its contents before feeding the pack. Here there was not even a squirrel nor an ermine. Once he had flushed a covey of ptarmigan, but they were too swift and wild for him. He was too hungry to stalk patiently.

Go back? No! He couldn't. He, Grey Cloud, had killed one of the master's pets—one of the pets for whom he cooked rice and salmon just as he did for Grey Cloud. Yet Grey Cloud himself was a pet—he knew the master had loved him. Why must he grieve for the two of them?

Suddenly a faint call reached his alert ears. . . . There it was again! A distress signal from one of his own breed. . . . A third time he faintly caught it: a mournful cry mounting higher and higher in shrill appeal to any living thing that might be within the boundaries of its great range.

The cry came on the breeze—the chill wind that blew from out the north. Grey Cloud turned his muzzle toward the sound and gave an answering signal, which rose to the heavens in a

deep, reverberating tremolo and carried far across the wilderness to the creature calling for help—miles away from Grey Cloud.

Again came the call: stronger it seemed, as if sent in a delirium of urgency.

The wolf-dog bounded in the direction of the appeal. Gradually the intervals between calls became greater, though the cries were louder as Grey Cloud ran on and on. At last he was met by a little female malamute—a pitiful, emaciated little creature that tried to show her delight at sight of him by circling and side-jumping. But they were pathetic attempts, for she had hardly strength to keep her feet. Like Grey Cloud himself, she was half starved.

She began to back-trail at once, flying ahead of him as fast as she could. At times she stumbled and had hard work to regain her footing. Presently Grey Cloud's nostrils were filled with the scent of his master's brothers, and then the little creature gained a well-worn trail that cut off a point where a creek flowed into the main Tubucktulick, and almost slid down the slippery path into the doorway of a log cabin.

The wolf-dog was close at her heels, and the leader yelped ecstatically to announce him. Here

was what her lord required. This great grey king would help him!

Grey Cloud faltered at the threshold. A voice from within called to him. It was not unlike the master's voice, but much weaker. "Hello, boy, where did you come from?" it said feebly.

Grey Cloud entered.

"Come on, boy, don't be afraid. Here I am over here, boy. Lord, what a dog!"

Grey Cloud went to the bedside. The man was wrapped in a great fur sleeping bag, and only his head was visible. There was no fire in the cabin.

Laboriously, painfully, he raised himself on his elbow and, suppressing a groan, reached for a match. Striking it, he lighted a candle and held it on Grey Cloud, who nosed up to him with the solicitude almost of a fellow human. The stranger held the lights on the name-plate of Grey Cloud's collar. With tremendous control he maintained his senses as he read the name of "Till Price."

"Till Price," he repeated over and over. "Till Price. Then you must be Grey Cloud," he said to the dog.

It sounded friendly and chum-like to Grey

Cloud to hear his own name. He wagged his great, bushy tail and looked deeper into the eyes of the stricken man.

"How did you get way over here?" The man puzzled. "I don't make it out. Unless you've been sent by God. God's the only person knew I was here—God and Fannie. Grey Cloud, could you eat?"

The man had a meagre store of biscuit and raisins within reach; he threw a biscuit to the wolf-dog, who devoured it ravenously.

But how about Fannie? This man, this brother of master, couldn't get up and cook rice and bacon for little Fannie, his guard. Somehow Grey Cloud realised that here were things that master should know.

The blood of kings was telling in Grey Cloud!

"Say, dog," the man's voice babbled on, "d-o-g spells dog, and G-o-d spells God. That shows the dog and God are not far from each other. And if there ever was a God among malamutes you're the dog, or the god—how they mix!"

Then his tone altered. Grey Cloud had not taken his eyes off from his face.

"Could you do it?" he cried. "Will God help you to do it?"

Taking a leaf from a tablet, he wrote with the stub of a pencil these words:

> For Till Price or whoever else gets this first. I'm over on Discovery Claim, El Dorado Creek, Tubucktulick River. Both feet frozen! Very little grub left. Bring a dog-salmon for Fannie.
>
> William Kerrigan.

This he folded and, wrapping it carefully in a piece of the oilcloth table-cover, he bound it to the collar of Grey Cloud, and lay back in the bag to wait and watch for a move from the dog.

He had no time to wait. Hadn't Grey Cloud been just on the point of turning back when Fannie's mournful call reached him? Hadn't he been in a hysteria of impatience ever since to be off—to feather-tread it back to his master without stop or swerve! . . . When Kerrigan looked up after settling himself back in his bag, Grey Cloud had vanished!

A mystic streak of grey, the dog was flying on his mission, straight to the trail as the raven tulukark of the Arctic. There was no "longest way round, shortest way home" on Grey Cloud's return trip.

The next night, just as Till Price was about to close his eyes in an endeavour to sleep, the team-

logs outside suddenly set up a wild chorus of howling. Before he could bound from his couch and slip on a mackinaw he heard a scratch on the door, and as he lifted the latch Grey Cloud lunged into the room!

They met each other in an embrace which for tenderness and transport of bliss is seldom equalled even between human beings. Then, faint for want of food and care, the great dog dropped to the floor. To Price's caressing hands he seemed a mere mass of bones. Murmuring words of pity and affection, with hands shaking and heart fluttering, he gave the dog a reviving dram of brandy and began preparing a savoury broth.

Suddenly his eye caught the packet at Grey Cloud's throat. He tore it off and held it to the light.

"Bill Kerrigan with his feet gone! The Tubucktulick—that's a good two days for the team. Old Cloud, where were you headed to—back to Octtoonah and the Shaktolick? . . . Yes, I know. You were ashamed, old fellow. Too bad about Brownie, but it strikes me that he got what he was trying to give you. Gad, I'm glad you're back, old Grey Cloud—my star dog!"

Price fed the weary beast, and the broth sent

the blood coursing through his veins. Oh, how good it was, and how delightfully drowsy he felt. Heavier, more leaden grew the great head—nodding, dropping, as Grey Cloud fought the sleep that was enveloping him.

His master was moving about the cabin. Through the thick walls of sleep, Grey Cloud thought he could faintly hear the tinkle of the bells of his leader breast-plate, and he dreamed that he was off for the cabin where Fannie had led him. . . .

When he awoke, the cabin seemed strangely lonely and deserted. He got up and arched his back, stretched his legs, and yapped an expressive yawn. Then the smell of a rich dog-salmon assailed his nostrils, and when he rubbed the sleep from his eyes he saw the red dried fish at his feet.

The odour of the master's touch was on it and Grey Cloud ate it with relish. He felt that he was himself again. Then he went into the harness lean-to adjoining the main living-room of the cabin; on his hook hung his own harness. And next it hung another—Brownie's. But the others—they had gone and left him to sleep, to dream lazily by the fire. He recalled the faintly-heard jingle of harness-bells. That must have been

master changing the lead-bells from his harness to the dog who was to lead.

There was a master! He had fed him, made him comfortable for the night, and left him a delicious breakfast. Then he had gone out into the heart of the dark Arctic night—across the wastes of the mountains—to the little log-cabin and Fannie!

The night held no terrors for Till Price. When he grasped Kerrigan's message, he knew there could be no "starting in the morning." The start must be made *now!*

Grey Cloud could stay in the cabin and enjoy the rest he had earned. He had the knack of opening the door by nosing the latch over the notch, so could manage very well by himself. Whiner should lead. He was a corking leader. Not of course a Grey Cloud, but still an exceptionally good lead-dog, and he would serve the purposes of this relief expedition. Poor Bill Kerrigan must be fetched in and cared for without delay.

"If we can only get there before Bill's feet begin to mortify—if there is only a chance to save them," he muttered, as he loaded the basket-

sleigh with necessities for Kerrigan. He shuddered as he loaded a can of kerosene on the sleigh. "That's the stuff to pull the frost out of your feet, Bill. But Heavens, what you go through when the blood seeks your toes again! Yes, and here's two fat salmon for Fannie. Bill didn't forget his little pal."

Whiner was keenly impatient as the midnight start was about to be made. He gloried in the joy of the lead-hitch. This was what he had wanted. This was what he had killed to get. Wild for the "mush-on" command from the master, he tugged away at the lead-line; and when the words came he fairly shot ahead into the blackness, the six eagerly pacing behind him.

Price had to tax his skill in managing the handle-bars. The team seemed possessed—they flew over the trail, seeming in some way to know that they were on a mission of mercy.

Just before the close of the second day they heard the call of a dog. Fannie had heard the jingling of sleigh-bells and had howled to direct the rescuers. She stood on the rise of the trail, just above the cabin where Kerrigan lay.

"There's Fannie!" Till shouted to the dogs.

"Come on, boys—this is the finish! Yip-yip! Here we come. Whoa, Whiner, steady-so!"

The sleigh slid down the embankment and stopped before the door of the cabin. Till called from the open door. "Hello, Bill. This is Price."

The reply within was scarcely audible as Price entered, with a lighted lantern.

Kerrigan was a sight to shake the nerve of a strong man. But he managed to get a hand out from the bag and reach it to Till. The touch of it sent a chill tremor through Price. It was icy! Here, old boy, don't talk; don't try to talk. Take a pull of this." Price held a flask to Kerrigan's lips, and the fiery spirits brought back a flicker of life. Next Price built a fire of the well-dried alders that lay at hand, and soon the cold cabin was glowing with heat.

Kerrigan revived rapidly. Tears came to his eyes as he tried to speak. "Is that you, Till? God sent Grey Cloud. Yes, God did it. Come, Grey Cloud. Come on, boy."

A grey muzzle was forced into the fingers which hung over the bunk—but it was Fannie's.

"He's home, Bill, the Cloud is. You'll have a chance to thank him when you get there. But

now I must see about getting a feed into you and your little guardian."

Price busied himself about the cooking and getting things ship-shape, and Kerrigan lay gazing and dreaming hazily—three letters stood before his eyes, repeating and interweaving themselves again and again. Three letters that meant *life!* Till was holding his head up, was bathing his face. The sleeping-bag was being removed from his aching body. The two leaden, pearly hued dead weights were being deftly treated and dressed. The hands of a Samaritan were passing over him. Ah, and then a great, soft, furry robe was being wrapped all about him.

His lips touched a delicious meat-soup. Oh, how good it tasted! The bunk seemed to rise on clouds—grey clouds, and there they were again —the three letters—d-o-g! G-o-d!—and clouds, grey clouds.

Kerrigan slept.

It seemed to him that he slept no more than an hour when he was roused by a touch on his shoulder. Till had waked him to eat a savoury breakfast and prepare for the trip to Council.

"Bill, you've certainly slept round the clock, old man. I had a hard time to keep from waking

you an hour or two back, too. There's some one here you'll be pleased to see. He's out flirting with your Fannie just now. Say, Bill, she's dippy about him."

Price went to the door. He was astonished to see that, instead of romping with Fannie, Grey Cloud was happily receiving lavish lickings and other dog manifestations of good-will from Whiner.

"Gad! I'm happy to see Whiner's buried the hatchet," said Price. Then he called his great leader and bade him go to Kerrigan.

"He got here this morning, Bill. Must have hot-footed it after us as soon as he ate his breakfast the next morning."

Kerrigan stroked the great grey head. He tried to speak to Grey Cloud, but choked on the words. At last, reaching over, he managed to throw both arms about the beautiful neck and stammer: You—you dog of God—Grey Cloud!"

A ONE-MAN DOG

VIII

A ONE-MAN DOG

I

IT WOULD have been as easy for me to change the four sentinel birches in my yard clearing to four funereal cypresses as to part with Grey Cloud for any money consideration. He had been promised to me before his birth; I had reared him from puppyhood, and for years he had been my comrade, the leader of my team, and the pride of my heart—the finest wolf-dog of the North. He was very truly a part of my life in this hard land of the eternal snows.

Even now, telling the story years after, I feel the same shudder of misgiving and dread that I felt on that day when Champ Galen and Kingdon Beach asked to borrow my leader. To neither of

them could I deny anything that it was possible for me to bestow, but no sense of obligation could have made me *willing* to part with Grey Cloud. They came at me point-blank, with no preamble.

"Till"—it was Beach who did the rapid firing—"Champ and I have got to beat it over the trail. We've *got* to get to Washington on the water-rights row. And we want The Cloud to lead the team out! We'll ship him back on the first boat from Seattle, and you know us for taking care of him."

He kept talking faster and faster, probably because I showed signs of swooning and he thought the quick restorative dope would be to tell me as much as he could, in as short a time as he could, about how devoted he and Champ both were to me and Grey Cloud, and how necessary it was for them to have him. They needed a leader to take their dogs over the thousand miles to the first place on the southeastern Alaska coast where they could board a coaster and beat the crack team of Paul Haakstadt—that flying Norwegian who was to be the dog puncher to carry out their enemy, the Blue Goose man.

My sympathies were always with Galen and Beach, who were the owners of the Golden Goose

outfit—the original stakers of the Sweetcake water and mineral rights; and the other bunch, the Blue Goose outfit, were just plain, every-day jumpers.

As for Paul Haakstadt, his duty was to convey passengers by means of his crack malamutes from one point of the far North to another. Haakstadt operated his dog stage for money. Big money. And when the lean Norwegian said he'd take a man to the far distant Kobuck—or the remote Colville—whether in dead of winter or when the rivers were in a riot of spring fresheting—he'd get there; often more dead than alive—but get there he would!

So the Blue Goose outfit had nailed Haakstadt to transport Hunter Jameson from Council to Skagway, a jaunt of some two thousand miles, so that he could embark on one of the regular outside packets and proceed to the footstools of the mighty at Washington—there to manipulate the leverage on justice with his ready bribe money.

To checkmate this move of the Blue Goose, Galen and Beach required a *king*. A leader they must have that could take the going in a no-trail country. A dog who would run at the head of the

team straight as the flight of a rifle-ball, and whose heart was of spring steel.

The Illiamna cut-off was to be their route—the most hazardous and dreaded of all the dangerous trails in Alaska. A run of a thousand miles; across the treacherous ice of Norton Sound, taking the Kaltag portage at Unalakleet, making the mail station in the valley of the Yukon, cutting across the Kuskokwim and, after crossing the Alaskans, making the interminable ascent to the ridge of the Aleutian crests, in whose cairns and glaciers lie scores of men, dogs, and outfits that have been picked up by terrific hurricanes and hurled bodily from their course into the abyss. There were nameless rivers of ice to cross; uncharted chains of mountains, snow-covered plains, lakes and glaciers.

And it was across this country that they wanted my hero wolf-dog to lead them.

It was indeed a tribute to Grey Cloud, for the Golden Goose dogs were of the thoroughbred strain of Siberia and the Selawick, champion trail-dogs—yet they needed my leader! Galen and Beach had dropped upon the bond of my friendship an acid which, thank God, retained its normal clarity. They did not see the opaque cloudiness

which would have proclaimed me of base metal. I let Grey Cloud go; but it was not ungrudgingly.

The grey king took my farewell caress like the grown fighting son of a veteran departing on his first campaign. Understanding and intelligence showed in his attitude as he stood majestically holding the swing-team taut, while they in turn strained the lead line until the breasters and wheel-team all stood on their toes awaiting the shout from Champ to release them.

"He'll be on the *Sawtooth* her first trip up the river. We'll ship the old boy in on the first boat out of Seattle," Kingdon Beach called back to me—I could just make him out through the mist which had formed between the departing expedition and my eyes. Then, with Champ swinging to the handle-bars and Beach's hundred and ninety as bow ballast, they dropped to the glare of the Neukluk trail.

I "yip-yip yahoo'ed" a good-bye to them all, and the beloved trail cry of the wilderness came back to me from Grey Cloud's uplifted muzzle—thrown on the air—with never a break in his perfect gait. He knew I would get it.

For me the following days seemed weeks, and the weeks in turn seemed months. True, I had

Whiner to guide my team about, and Bob, the old outrunner, was not so far gone but that he could serve as a pinch leader. But all the time my heart was heavy with anxiety and apprehensions that seemed to me like presentiment. Champ or Kingdon might not guard The Cloud from the jealous rage of the team dogs, as I had been forced to do since his puppydom. The route was too difficult—it was near break-up time—disaster was so easy. I found myself reproaching my friends for demanding such a sacrifice.

As I found out later, my restless fears were at their height on the day when the party had been out just a month; when only sixty miles remained between them and their goal—the trapper's camp on Kamishak Bay.

II

That night Champ Galen had already curled up in his lynx-lined sleeping-bag and almost immediately slept the dead sleep of the exhausted. Beach sat knees up in the glow of the spruce bonfire and made notations in his diary, which he had faithfully kept since leaving the Neukluk.

"Looks like we missed her," he said, thinking of the steamboat. The words were not intention-

ally addressed to any one, but the grey dog at his side was alert in an instant to be the recipient of any confidences the big fur-clad man had to offer. He was much like Grey Cloud's master, this man —very kind and thoughtful of the comfort of the dogs, even placing their needs before his own. Grey Cloud slipped his muzzle under the wolverine wrist fur of Beach's parka and kept nosing out until the fingers of the man closed involuntarily upon it. He had a message for Beach: hadn't he noticed *the signs* as the camp stretch was being covered in the fast-falling twilight?

Beach had finished his writing and sat moodily gazing at the efflorescence of the snow crust at his feet. The myriad colours pranced about in his tired brain. He was past noticing the restlessness of the team dogs. Almost unconsciously he stroked the cold nose of the wonderful animal at his side. His head drooped, and, as if in a trance, instinctively he pulled the covering flap of his sleeping-bag over his head as he wearily sank into sleep.

As soon as the team dogs sensed that their human protection was for the time denied them, they broke the mystic stillness of the night with cries of fright, and their chains clanked as they snapped

them taut in the effort to break and run to the shelter of the burning logs.

Grey Cloud went to them, wagging his great tail and by other dog signals urging them to keep their heads. He knew very well that the enemy they feared never quit if once the dogs show fright. He knew—because he had the enemy's blood in his own veins—he was half wolf himself.

As he argued with his team-mates, a weird streak of grey shambled across the shaft of light which struck into an aisle of the spruce. It stopped and turned, and the Golden Goose dogs cowered before the green-yellow of the burning eyes. But Grey Cloud stood at defiance and growled a challenge at the ghostlike scout, then uttered a call of the pack which set the timber to vibrating with the return laugh-like howls of the duped timber-wolves. They thought their reconnoitring scout had reported. Grey Cloud had sent the message which told the waiting pack that the quarry was alert and unafraid.

The howls died suddenly, as if a conductor had struck a stop attitude with his baton.

Dead fagged as they were, Galen and Beach slept with their senses on a hair trigger, and at the first frightened yells of their team dogs they

had wakened and clutched the pistol grips of their rifles, listening.

"Do you get old Grey Cloud?" said Galen. "He's having the time of his life."

"Tell 'em to go to hell, Cloud!"

"King, roll over and get a two-hour shift. I'll keep the blaze up and then I'll give you a watch at it."

There were no tenderfoot hysterics for these old arctic travellers. Beach simply reached over and, patting his partner affectionately, dropped into the folds of his bag and was soon asleep.

Galen threw a log on the glowing embers and, taking an axe, went the rounds of the dog stakes and gave each a blow to imbed it more firmly in the hard-packed snow, patting the dogs and stroking them reassuringly. Then he sat out his watch.

Beach, at the end of his turn, fried the bacon and toasted the hardtack, and when the cover of the coffee-pot was lifted on a seething brown foam, he shook Galen awake.

It was still hardly daylight. Of the sixty miles yet before them, forty were of the fastest spring going they had encountered; the remaining twenty were practically steep up-grade all the way: a zigzag, crisscrossing trail up and over the Aleu-

tian Mountains which flank the southeast boundary of Alaska and stretch out along a thousand miles of archipelago, reaching for the Asiatic coast-line.

The day before, the dogs had hung back, as if reluctant to leave the delicious odours of bacon that hung about the breakfasting place. Grey Cloud had had to pull them along. To-day they crowded, panicky, wild with fear. The leader alone seemed self-possessed, racing out in front with all the steady energy of a first day out. He knew it was his business to hold the team in check, to keep them from showing the white feather.

When the timber receded and the flats stretched out before them, Beach and Galen boarded the sleigh and with their feet attempted to hold it in brake.

"They're running free," shouted Galen.

"The devil's behind them," said Beach.

"Price's leader doesn't give a damn."

The wind came out of the north, at their backs, and not only to the dogs but even to the trail men, with their sensitive nostrils, it carried the scent of wild beasts.

"See where that shaft of sunlight hits a crest that looks like a bronze conning-tower?" Beach

pointed dead ahead where a copper-red peak gleamed in the distance. "That's the gateway to the pass that takes us over to the camp of Baranoff, the trapper. It's twenty miles beyond there!"

Galen looked at the shining object and then, turning, peered at the timber a thousand yards behind. Look, King—they're coming out four abreast, so's we can't figure them out."

"From the tracks we crossed a while ago I should say there's a million of them," Beach said; "although one wolf can make a million tracks if he's got the time."

"Well, I'm going to put a mushroom among 'em."

Galen, hunched into a sitting posture on top of the sleigh, drew a steady bead from an unsteady perch, and a grey wolf, leaping clear of the pack, told how deadly that aim was. "We might as well feed 'em wolf, King. And if they get tired eating themselves, there's wolf meat for the 'tu-lu-kark,' and that ought to fix us with the Indian gods. If we've got old Ano-cluck-tuck (God of the Wind) to help us by day and that beautiful Dark-i-ock-tuck (the Moon) to guide us by night, why should we hesitate to—bang!

there's another—spread a little wolf-meat on their altars!"

Grey Cloud caught the spirit of the masters riding behind him. He sensed their confidence and their fighting courage. They knew, these three, the utter futility of trying to tire those beasts out. The dogs at top speed can't make them break their tireless shamble—a cross between a lope and a canter—a gait that no man can define. They quit only when they realise there's positively no chance to catch their prey off guard.

They were out of sight now. To-night they would be on hand. To-night would be their last chance to strike.

"How far did you say that red top is, King?"

"Not more than twenty miles from here, and if we can hike along all day the way we've covered the last ten, we can make it in good shape before time to camp."

Two hours later they drew up in the valley of the pass that leads to the Baranoff camp on Kamishak Bay. The rugged crag that at the outset of their trip that day had shone red and lustrous in the distance now rose sheer and dark on their right.

The day was not yet done. The Maytime sun

was still shining. The dogs had demonstrated their breeding. They had covered forty tough miles in record time.

"Well, King, they're pretty fit—feet all seem to be O. K., and if you say so we may as well keep on and wind her up on this day's run. It's twenty miles. We ought to get to the bluff above Baranoff's, if we don't get chawed up by the crow-feed, in about three minutes before the sun goes black."

The dogs set to the task of extra going as if it were but the beginning of the last mile of home-stretch instead of twenty miles of the hardest, most heart-breaking uphill in Alaska. In places Grey Cloud ran plump against a snow-barrier, but, nothing daunted, he'd jump it and lift the swing-team clear of the ground in an effort to hoist them up also. Then Beach and Galen would go ahead and lift the dogs up to the trail again and after them the loaded sleigh—a task at which men of less physical strength and endurance would have balked. They held to the sleigh as the team started off, and so were pulled up from the lower level.

Before an hour had passed in the timber of the Kamishak trail, Grey Cloud caught the scent

of the wolves in their wake. He tossed his great head in the air and called out an exultant challenge.

"They're back again," said Champ. "Came from nowhere."

"What foxes to wait till we struck the dark of the spruce!" exclaimed Beach. "Well, if The Cloud can keep the team jollied so that they don't stampede us over one of these gulch banks, we'll make it all right. How do you feel, Champ?"

"I'd feel better if we were coasting down the last half-mile to Baranoff's shack. It looks like the grey devils were going to come close this time. They know they've got to strike soon or never."

The two men had each rigged a breast-plate and tug-line to the sleigh and were now pulling along with the dogs. The sun had already begun to drop behind the northern range, and the creepy shadiness of the spruce enveloped them like a pall.

Before Grey Cloud there was no trail. The marvellous instinct which made him the leader he was, led him in a direct line up the steep going, always working for the nearest point ahead by the shortest of straight routes. At times he skirted

precipices and frightful chasms, and the man who happened to be on the down side would vault the sleigh and pull with all his might and heart to keep it from skidding over.

Once they came upon a rude cross stuck up in a base of piled rocks.

"That's where Ramse Jorgunsen and his team were blown over," said Galen.

"Champ, we're all right. We'll make everything fine. There's no wind a-blowin' here, and this is where the old boy cooks up all the wind and lets it out of the bag. . . . Poor old Ramse!"

On they toiled. The team dogs whimpered apprehensively, sensing the blood-thirsty pack shambling so swiftly behind them. Grey Cloud worked as never before. If he could only make the plateau in time! Here, where they were climbing, there was only a thousand feet of nothing between their narrow path and the bed of the gorge. The Cloud's foot cushions were cut and the blood spurted from between his toes. The ice crust of the spring snows was doing its nasty worst to hold him back. The team dogs, too, were badly lacerated about feet and hocks. But the superb control of the great beast at their head kept them going on—half desperate, half adoring

and trusting. They still whimpered, shuddering at the silent, mistlike foe flitting back there in the woods.

Presently the strain on Grey Cloud's collar slackened a little; the worst of the uphill going was over.

"Through this brake of birch and spruce for a hundred yards and we're in the clear"—Kingdon fairly sang the words.

They struck the shade of the brake, Grey Cloud running true to a point ahead and yip-yahooing a fearless ode of conquest. The crisis was dead ahead of him, he knew.

The mistlike foe with the green-yellow firelight in their eyes!

They began to flit by, going ahead, around and alongside the outfit.

Grey Cloud never faltered. On he plunged, giving the battle-cry of the old Shaktolik, where he was whelped with a litter of Norton Sound timber greys—tribe alien to these marauding, man-attacking pirates of the southern coast.

His nerve was infectious. The entire team threw their shoulders into their collar-pads with frenzied energy, backing him up with splendid courage.

Galen and Beach were blazing away into the grey mist, one-handed shots, at random, to confuse the impending attack.

"King, what makes them so persistent to get us?" Galen shouted hoarsely.

"They've feasted on man flesh hereabouts many a time. They've got the taste of it. Hell's spawn, that's what they are!" The fire of fight was ablaze in Beach. His rifle was spitting spreaders as fast as he could pump them into the barrel-chamber.

"The old grey leader is giving them their own Choctaw," yelled Galen excitedly. "I think he's got 'em buffaloed. The rest of the team is beginning to show fight too."

Grey Cloud was now bounding ahead on a swift, level trail. The timber belt was left behind! Yet on he whipped at racing swiftness. He was on a well-packed groove, and far in the distance he could see a flashing light.

"Hurrah!" yelled Beach. "That's the Augustine Island beacon, out in the inlet. We're on top of Baranoff's now! Champ, *we've got 'em beat!*"

True, true it was. The grey blur of the hungry pack merged into the receding timber. . . .

Their wolf howls died out to a mocking, high-pitched call. . . . They were beaten.

And the two men of the Northland knew perfectly well that it was not they who had done it. It was nothing but the indomitable fighting spirit of the big grey lead dog, who had shown six panicky trailers how to behave under fire, and turned them into six stanch workers, steady, brave, controlled. Oh, yes, Grey Cloud had won!

A bend in the trail, which here shot almost sheer downward, showed the cabin light of the trapper Baranoff. Lantern in hand, he came out of the shack to welcome the Neukluk outfit. A powerfully built, square-jawed man he was, shaggy-browed and friendly eyed. He flew to the task of unhooking the dogs, who dropped where they stood, fagged, quite done.

"They look pretty tough, partners. She's an awful pull up from the flat." His voice was deep and musical.

The dogs set to licking their foot cushions, to which the ice hung in globular crystals. These they bit off. Grey Cloud alone stood wagging, his great brush, waiting for the friends of his owner to come to him and offer congratulations.

His wait was not long. Beach and Galen

wrapped their arms about the old fellow's neck in a grateful embrace. All that ordinarily would have been of the first importance upon their arrival, got no attention whatever. The great lead dog and the team absorbed all the interest.

Baranoff held his light on Grey Cloud. "Boys, what a dog!" he gasped. "He's the dog of my dreams! I've got a January silver fox I'll give you for him. Yes, and a pack of prime otter, too!" His eyes gleamed covetously.

Beach and Galen told him the dog was not theirs, and quickly turned the subject. They asked of the Seattle packet. Had it arrived yet; or when was it due?

"The *Kadiak* is due on the first of June," Baranoff replied. "What is it now? Let me see—the fourteenth of May. You boys have got a nice little visit coming to you." And he bade them make themselves at home.

Crying at Fate is not one of the practices of good Northmen, and for the ensuing two weeks Galen and Beach made the best of their enforced visit at the trapper's camp.

Meantime, the trapper did everything within his power for the men and dogs. Repeatedly he made offers of trade for Grey Cloud. Here was

a dog the like of which he had tried to raise for years. He wanted him. Even in face of the men's renewed assertion that The Cloud was only loaned them by his owner in the Neukluk country, Baranoff persisted. His jaws were not square for nothing. He was determined that Grey Cloud should be lord of his kennels.

He began an insidious playing of his trumps. He heaped attentions on Galen and Beach, made the delay at which they had chafed, a time of positive pleasure.

But finally the black waveline of the *Kadiak's* smoke appeared on the horizon and the partners prepared to embark. The time came for the settlement of their score with Baranoff, and Galen approached him, wallet in hand, as the *Kadiak's* long boat was pulling ashore.

"Baranoff, you've certainly shown us a good stay. What do we owe?"

The wily gleam of generations of Baranoffs shone in the trapper's eyes. "I suppose you boys wouldn't refuse me anything I might consider reasonable, would you?"

"Why, no, of course not. How much do you want?"

"*Nothing—or that dog!*"

The Russian had played his ace.

Beach looked at Galen, and, as their eyes met, the look of each confessed to the other that they were securely trapped.

"Lord, what will Till do?"

"What'll he do? He'll understand!"

"Baranoff's got us."

"Well, one thing's a cinch, The Cloud will sure have a crack home with him."

And so Grey Cloud passed into the ownership of the Kamishak trapper. . . .

Galen and Beach were very unhappy when the other dogs and the sleigh had been placed in the longboat, together with a shipment of pelts of Baranoff's. They dared not look back where the trapper stood, holding their friend's champion. . . . Grey Cloud, strained to break from the Russian and plunge into the surf after them.

Baranoff, watching, shrugged his massive shoulders with a gloating grimace which meant that to him the end justified the means. The fact that he had got this wonderful dog by a rotten plot, that he had sacrificed three men to do it—mattered nothing: he wanted the dog; he'd got him!

He began at once trying to accustom Grey Cloud to his voice and his command, eager for a

response—for, at least, despite his crookedness, he craved the dog's affection as well as his services. But Grey Cloud's affection was not to be coerced. The food that was abundantly provided for him he devoured, but simply to aid his quick recovery to normal condition. No sneaking Muscovite could buy his fidelity, or hope to obliterate the face and voice of his own—his very own—master. The Cloud knew that this man did not ring true. He scorned his mongrel-infested kennels. He withheld the friendly dropping of his ears and the wigwagging of a cordial tail. Instead, he showed displeasure and disgust by a backward curling of his lip, baring his lance tusks at almost every approach of the Russian to his chain-post, where he was kept a secure prisoner.

Baranoff tried every means to propitiate his unwilling captive. But his insinuating attempts at sympathy, his advances with outstretched hands, were all faithfully repulsed by the dog whose heart was true to but one. And he watched ceaselessly for the first laxity in his jailer's vigil.

Then suddenly the great dog changed his bearing. He began to submit to Baranoff's advances. He no longer showed his teeth at him, and he even let the trapper stroke his muzzle. Baranoff

thought he had won, and at the end of two weeks Grey Cloud again had his freedom.

When the evening meal of that first day of liberty was over, when Grey Cloud had crammed himself with enough rich salmon and rice to fortify him against a foodless week . . . he left Baranoff's camp forever.

The last that the trapper saw of him was a magnificent grey form silhouetted against the crimson heavens above the ridge which banks the southern seacoast.

The Russian's rage was infinite. He plunged into the cabin and returned with a long-barrelled rifle—but there was nothing upon which to hold it! The spoils of duplicity had slipped from his clutch, unenjoyed: the great wolf-dog had never for a moment been his. Grey Cloud was *a one-man dog.*

III

It was two weeks since the *Sawtooth* had been skidded off her ways and had begun her trip down Fish River bound for Dexter's in Golovin Bay. There she was to take the cargo of the *St. Paul* consigned to the Golden Goose, Ophir, and Sweet-

cake outfits, and in that cargo was the treasure that had been out of my keeping so long.

I had impatiently haunted the landing on Fish River for two long days. Feverishly I had trekked up to the promontory above the boat-landing for a glimpse of the *Sawtooth* as she rounded into view down-stream. It seemed as if she would never come.

Then suddenly the dogs began a wailing, miles down-stream, which was taken up by every malamute as it came within their hearing, and at this dog sign, which each spring is as absolute as sight of the boat herself, the town broke into the cry of "Steamboat! Steamboat!" Axes poised to hew or cross-cut were dropped without the finishing down thrust. The whir of the ivory ball in the gambling-houses stopped short. Waiters, bartenders, miners, and girls all rushed down to the landing to greet the first boatload of outsiders.

Finally the puff of the *Sawtooth's* exhaust was audible, and then she blew a long howdy-do on her shrill whistle and slowly chug-chugged up to the landing. I stood at the edge of the little dock, in momentary danger of being jostled into the river.

Then I saw him! And he saw me!

Drawn and gaunt he looked. But his eyes blazed with love as he made me out standing there, and I knew that the leanness was but the result of the terrible strain he had endured since parting from me.

As the packet was made fast, George Greenwood, who captained her, held Grey Cloud up to the rail and handed him to me. "You're in luck, Till," he said. "Ed Dexter had drawn a bead sight on him and was about to plug him when old John saw he was dog and not wolf!"

"What?" I stammered.

"Sure," continued George. "He came down from the McKinley Creek portage headed straight for Dexter. Ed thought he was a wolf and grabbed a gun."

"From the McKinley Creek portage!" I gasped. There was no boat route from there. Where had Beach and Galen left Grey Cloud? "Is the *St. Paul* in, George?" I asked. The *St. Paul* was the only boat from which he could have been transferred to the *Sawtooth*.

"She's at Nome," he said. "The ice wouldn't let her come in here from St. Michael. The *Discovery* made it down from Nome, and Captain

Tremper told me he had mail for you from the outside. It's in the purser's sack."

When I eventually secured the letter, I trembled like a leaf as I opened it.

It explained incoherently what had occurred when Galen and Beach made the trapper's camp. It was full of distress and pleas for forgiveness.

"Till," Champ wrote in closing, "I knew that something was coming off wrong for us when I started getting into that heavy medicine-man stuff on the trail. I invoked the names of Ano-cluck-tuck and then cut in with Dark-i-ock-tuck. I must have got them mixed."

"No," I said as I circled the great neck of my dog, "the god of the winds and the moon goddess did us no wrong, did they, acushla! They did not part us for long. Well, there shall be but one more parting for us, old boy, and I'm hoping that when the time comes for that—well—we'll just make the 'big divide' journey together."

"A BLACK WOLF-SKIN!"

IX

"A BLACK WOLF-SKIN!"

KOBUCK was a striking specimen of the Alaskan wolf-bred trail dog. He was not of the usual grey breed but a royal black. He was richly furred and unmarked except for a tawny breast streak, with matching leg sheaths and two slightly deeper tan brow dots.

There was much to-do among the Immachucks when the superb Juno presented this black pearl to Till Price, her master. Even the Good Hope Indians braved the terrible Bear Creek divide to come to the Price camp and pay their respects to the new-born descendant of the rare black wolf.

Kutaro, their aged chieftain, majestically recanted a legend of his illustrious grandsire which had for its chief character a wonderful black wolf who reigned in the Trinity Pass Mountains, the

indisputable monarch of all the Kotzebue wolf packs. In Kutaro's mind he was certain that Juno, the grey princess, had given birth to the reincarnation of the ancient black wolf King. Kobuck accordingly grew to royal maturity. He seemed to sense his noble ascendency over all malamutes. To but one living thing did his proud head bow in subjection. That was his adored master, Till Price.

Unlike his team-mates, Kobuck never displayed the slightest jealousy or temper when Price chose to caress or fuss over any other dog. He did not covet the lead hitch—as does almost every dog in every team—notwithstanding lack of physical and temperamental requirements for this position.

He seemed to know that he was too big of bone, too heroic of barrel and chest, to be fit for any post but where master worked him, in the wheel hitch.

The racing dog-men of Nome having heard of Price's black malamute came over the hundred miles in hopes of a possible trade for him. They all returned without the black prize dog in their crack teams. The more other people sought to secure Kobuck from him just so much more did Price become attached to the dog. So, as is not

uncommon in the Northland, master and dog became inseparable and indispensable the one to the other. Kobuck and Till Price were indeed as one.

Summer was on—the warm, luscious water season. The spring sun had completely relaxed the adamant grip of winter, and the mosses, birds, and wild flowers filled the air with song and sweet perfume.

To Deering—the little town which nestled in the lea of Cape Esbenberg—came Price, his Indian boy Agrook, and the black malamute, Kobuck. In the placid bay—a hundred yards from the beach—lay the *Wolverine*, a little power sloop owned and captained by one Hunter. Captain Hunter he was called. He traded among the Indians.

He knew the simple aboriginal mind—and invited the native trappers aboard his craft to make free with his hospitality—and bring their precious furs.

His partner, Shungtowah, a Keokuk Eskimo, was ashore announcing to the Indians that at three o'clock of that afternoon Captain Hunter would receive all who had furs or ivory to sell and would

also then be happy to offer them a tiny cup of the white man's firewater!

"Just one cup," said Shungtowah. His voice dropped to a whisper when he spoke the word "Tonga." Shungtowah knew as well as his unscrupulous master that in giving this hell-water to the Indians he was party to a specific violation of the law of the land.

But he knew, too, that the Indian trappers and hunters would kill for a cup of the liquid fire, and then perjure their souls to protect the beast who gave it to them.

As Shungtowah was about to step into his canoe on his return to the *Wolverine* he saw on the rise, back from and above the beach, what he mistook for two Indians—and a great black-furred animal, which was tame and frolicked playfully about the two.

"Ah-ki-kah," he exclaimed. "A black wolf!" Here was a little party to invite to the debauch planned aboard the sloop that he had not seen before. And here, too, was a pelt that he knew to be second only in value to a silver-tipped fox.

"Ah-ki-kah," Shungtowah repeated as he approached and then suddenly stopped. He was plainly surprised to see that but one was of his

race. The expression of eager anticipation faded from his face as he recognised the Indian boy Agrook and his master, the great trailsman, Till Price. He also knew Kobuck by reputation, but never before to-day had he seen the famous black trail dog. Shungtowah's eyes narrowed to a crafty slant. There was something in the presence here of these unexpected persons that did not fit into arrangements as scheduled by himself and Captain Hunter.

He could not keep his eyes from the dog. Kobuck felt as though the gleam from Shungtowah's head slits were scorching his very bones. The dog felt intuitively that the man before him meant evil. He uttered one alarming whimper and hugged close to his master's legs.

Agrook stepped aggressively before both master and dog.

"Choo-na-pa-jook-tuck?" he asked of Shungtowah.

Price reached a staying hand, and spoke before the Keokuk could reply.

"Well, Shungtowah," he said, "I presume you will take a good load back to Nome. We have had a big snow up here this winter and the skins are plentiful and prime."

"What's Hunter paying with this year? Money—lead—or Tonga!"

Price laid an unmistakable stress on the last word.

"Let's see—Shungtowah—last year, you remember last year, don't you?" The Eskimo stepped back apace. He felt that the smooth words of the speaker were intended to hold some menace for him. Price coolly continued:

"Well, you and Hunter made a big haul right here and at just this time. It cost you nothing but alcohol. Then after you had sailed away, it took what sober men there were left, four days to build burial caches for the dead hunters. You are here again, as I have foreseen, and have the trap set and baited for this season's catch, the same as last year."

"Now, Shungtowah, you go out to Hunter on the boat, and tell him that I am not going to leave this beach until he weighs anchor and rounds the Cape. And that, maybe after that even, I'll stick around a day or two."

The Keokuk—who whilst listening had been intently regarding Kobuck—or Kobuck's wonderful skin—now looked at Price—and with the usual reply of a sly aborigine said:

"Me no savee—you stop, you want to, Mr. Price. Cap Hunter no care!"

"Well, do you savee this?" Till Price threw open his mackinaw jacket and displayed, pinned to his moose hide shirt, the shining badge of a Deputy U. S. Marshal.

Shungtowah saveed that all right. It's glittering eloquence seemed to hit him fair between the eyes. He backed away and then turned, to fly to his canoe and push off toward the *Wolverine.*

Upon his arrival he found Hunter standing at the rail. Through a pair of binoculars, which he now returned to their case, the trader had seen everything that had gone on ashore.

"Shung," he said, "are those two bucks with the *live black hide* comin' out?"

Like all of his ilk, no fur-bearing animal dead or alive meant anything to him—except what money could be realised out of the sale or purchase of its skin.

"Wot is that black pelt, Shung?—looks like a big black wolf. It won't be worth a damn now, but we'll keep him alive till January and then with the fur prime we'll get a pot of money for that skin."

"Where are they from, those two? Here, wot's the matter with you; you look green!"

"I saw you Chocktaw to those two—wot's the matter; did they scare you?"

"No, Cap, not scare much, but maybe now—me speak, you scare——"

"Me scare—wot's eatin' you?—you frozen tom-cod. Come on, spit it out!"

"Only one Indian—those two—he Agrook, big brave, grandson Pommowchuck,—the other Nee-low-ogh-meed! (White man)—Till Price!"

"Wot? That Till Price? Well he's damn well coppered, even through the glasses. He looks like a Mazinka Indian."

"Yes—he say no leave sand-spit till *Wolverine* go!"

"He Marshal—got medal—show me!"

Hunter swore a deep sea oath, and he *did* scare. This discovery completely upset all his dead reckoning; a computation of figures and anticipations that began months ago and which was just now about to be proved.

Running true to a cowardly heart, his first thought was of instant and precipitate flight. But a succeeding one caused him to adjust the

glass complacently to his eyes and once more give Price, Agrook, and Kobuck a keen looking over.

"Shung," he said, still looking through the binocular, "let's get out er here; there's something about the cut of that Price's jaw that makes this place seem unhealthy. Let's head for the Shungnak—that ought to be far away enough so that no damned interfering policeman kin stop my legitimate business."

"But now you hearken to me, Shung. One thing I must have, to square figures for this day's loss. D'ye hear? I want that black malamute's pelt!"

"D'ye understand, you yellow picture of bad medicine? I want that pelt—want it clean—with no blood marks—and *you've* got to get it for me. Snare it—dead-fall it. Arsenic—chloroform, or a steel jacket slug through the eye! Do you get me, Shung?"

"Some time in January you must come up here and get that black hide—I can see the shine on his guard hair even now, clean off season too, for a pelt."

Hunter again encased the glasses. He saw the dubious look on Shungtowah's face. He had offered no inducement for the Keokuk, in speaking his devilish mind.

"Two hundred in gold for you—when you bring it to me, Shung—two hundred!"

Then to himself he muttered, "If I can't get a thousand clear for that pelt, I'm a Shanghai pirate!" Which in truth he was.

By three o'clock the *Wolverine* was standing on the Arctic horizon—"wing and wing" headed north by east.

In only one respect had Price's order to her skipper been disregarded; he had not taken her round the Cape.

"Well, Agrook," said Till, gazing seaward at the departing sloop, "at any rate they're gone. You must now go among those Indians and tell them that I shall see to it that their furs are fairly traded for them. Make them understand what a narrow escape they've had. Did you see the way that Keokuk Eskimo kept sizing Kobuck up?"

"Oong," affirmed the Indian. "He want Kobuck skin!"

"Well, anybody gets your pelt, old dear," said Price, affectionately, crushing the beautiful dog to him, "will have to strip me clean of mine first."

"Me too," said Agrook.

Kobuck shivered in his master's embrace.

"My God, Agrook—there's something up. He just told me there's some hellish plot afoot. Ah, dog, how easy it would be for me to commit murder for you."

Hunter's prediction that by mid-January Kobuck's coat would be rich and rare—was by that time indeed true.

All the glisten, all the sheen and life that dead winter brings to Alaska fur animals were evident in the gorgeous fur of the black wolf dog Kobuck. It rippled and glowed with electric vitality and splendour. So too by that time had the fiendish intent of the Keokuk Eskimo festered and ripened for execution. Already he had come by circuitous ways to the vicinity of the Price camp at the head of the frozen Immachuck River. Shungtowah had purposely avoided the usual Noxapoga and Kewalick routes to this point.

In his sleigh he had every known device to capture a wary wild animal, and in his brain he had every cunning trick of the native hunter to make the utmost use of his weapons and traps. Once it was located, Shungtowah's prey had but slight chance of escape.

He had made a weather camp in a dense thicket

of cottonwood alders about five miles from Price's.

Before darkness on the day of his arrival, Shungtowah had set a powerful steel trap in a channel-like depression which formed a natural pass trail from the general direction of the home of his victim. He had taken the precaution to carefully swath the jaws of the trap with a binding of flannel thus to avoid abrasions on the leg fur of its victim when captured.

A slight frost-fall which had continued through the night made the success of this deadly contraption doubly sure. No living thing except the trapper himself could scent or possibly suspect its presence.

The next afternoon he roasted a great chunk of caribou flesh. When darkness fell and after each of his own trail dogs had been chained to stakes, Shungtowah stalked away from his lair in a beeline for the Price camp. Behind him from a skin rope slung over his shoulder he dragged the savoury smelling burnt meat directly in his tracks.

Shungtowah knew this ancient method of enticing prey to the traps to be as unfailing to-night as it was when, ages before, it was practised by his primeval forefathers.

He advanced to within a mile of the snug Price camp and then began a complete encircling path of it, upon which he continued until he again encountered his original track.

It was a dry frosty night and whatever slight breeze stirred carried with it the appetising odour to any animal that perchance was within its reach.

Shungtowah then retracked to his den and like a deadly spider established himself alert to despatch his prey—when it approached to his own destruction. It may perforce be a long wait. But cat-like patience was as second nature to the Keokuk native.

The precious black skin would surely come some time. He would wait.

Meanwhile the rarefied Arctic air carried on its waves the rich smell of the barbecued deer meat—carried it far, much farther than its diabolical cook had estimated.

Next morning Agrook entered the cabin with a perplexed expression on his face and an unusual agitation in his manner.

"Hello, Agrook—what's up this morning?" asked Till—noting his queer demeanour.

"Ki-o-me. Dogs all funny this morning. All heads up. Smell something, I guess. Kobuck much excited. All crying—maybe bear come last night."

"Well, let's hook up and get down the river to McCormick's—we're late to-day."

Price immediately saw that something was stirring among the team dogs. Each one seemed nervous and excited. Even Trilby, a sleek, wolfish mother malamute, was disturbed.

She had curled herself so completely and protectingly around her litter of young that they could scarcely be seen. Agrook and Price both sniffed the air as the dogs were doing. Like the animals, they too had developed a marvellous sense of scent.

Soon, however, amid the jingle of the sleigh bells and the ya-hooing of both drivers they sped down the river trail with racing speed.

"Well, whatever it is, Agrook, it's nothing that they're afraid of. Look how they're running. Gads—they act as if they were mad!"

Suddenly Price and the native boy were both jerked from the sleigh rail which they rode. The whole team had swerved abruptly from the trail

and were on a wild plunge in a direct right angle off their course.

"Quick, Agrook—throw the sleigh," commanded Till.

Instantly the supple basket was thrown on its side and with both men feet foremost, using themselves as rough drags, they were buried to their necks in the snow bank which surged up, before the crazy outfit stopped.

It took much use of the stinging black-snake to once more head the team on the down river trail and not until another five miles had been covered did the dogs stop throwing back their heads.

"What do you suppose it was, Agrook? A big flock of ptarmigan perhaps. You know how the pups love to chase 'em."

"Did you look for any tracks? I confess I clean forgot everything but getting them on the trail again."

"Ki-o-me oo-nah. I don't know," answered Agrook in two languages. "I forget to look, too. I look to-night, Till. Maybe 'dook-dook' (caribou) tracks."

"You'll look to-night. It will be dark when we come back," said Price. "Double chain them

when we get to McCormick's. I feel the whole crew of them are fixing to bolt."

"Chain Kobuck, too, Till?"

"Why, Agrook, you know he's never had a chain on him in his life. Do you think I'd let him get the thought in his head that I had lost faith in him?"

"I should say not! Say, boy, you can bet a hundred to one that no bunch of ptarmigan or any stray caribou are going to wean my Kobuck away from me!"

At the McCormick camp Agrook attached each dog to the runner standards of the sleigh. Could he have understood the meaning of the look in Kobuck's eyes, the Indian would no doubt have secured him too—notwithstanding Till's faith in the great dog.

Kobuck almost asked to be chained! There was some force which had taken mastery of his soul. Something there was in the tang of the wild smell that had been filling his nostrils which intoxicated his senses completely. He felt an overwhelming impulse to be off in one ecstatic charge after the source of that sublime odour.

Till Price was part owner in the McCormick mine. Every day during the winter it was the

custom for both he and Agrook to work a four-hour shift in it—underground. They were drifting on a rich pay streak which they barrowed to the shaft chamber to be hoisted and washed up in the spring.

Price, before he went to the lower level, always stood on the ladder in the throat of the shaft and gave Kobuck a crushing hug, after which the dog curled up just where he had been so left and waited for Till's reappearance at the end of the day's work.

To-day the black dog shivered in the arms of his master. Price's mind flashed back to the summer—when once before he had felt the same sort of shudder pass through his pet's frame. Shungtowah, the Keokuk trader, had then in some weird manner affected Kobuck. Price had then, too, been enveloped in this selfsame negative thrill.

As he descended the ladder foot by foot so in like ratio rose his apprehension. And when he finally reached the treasure chamber a hundred feet down he was on the brink of despair. His head tried repeatedly to claim ascendency over his heart. But no, he would not venture to the surface. "No power can seduce Kobuck from me. He'll be there when I go up at the end of the

shift." So his mind worked, as his body toiled.

Four hours later he and Agrook emerged from the shaft to hear the team dogs giving tongue to their ancient fear cry—a mystic, sorrowful wail. They were but faintly visible in the phantom-like Arctic twilight—and Kobuck, the black malamute, nowhere in sight. He had vanished.

"Ah-kah-oonah!" wailed Agrook.

"My God! He's gone!" said Price.

At just about this time of the same day Shungtowah, squatting before his camp-fire, was roasting yet another chunk of caribou meat. Like a sardonic Mephisto, he sat in the glow of the coals turning the meat on the end of a birch spit. When finally it was done, he feasted himself full, tearing at the blood-rare flesh like a wild beast and occasionally dashing off a tin cup of his own made "hootch."

His three emaciated dogs were each gnawing away ravenously at a dried salmon. Hungry looking and underfed they were.

A mile away—back in the foot-hills that flank the Trinity range—the aroma born of roasted deer meat had attracted from their domain a countless pack of grey timber wolves. It was nothing

new to this pack, this lure of cooked flesh. They had been up against its deceit before. So now they were assembled in grand conclave, and standing in the centre of the grey ring their King was awaiting the report of the scouts.

He meant to strike, but not blindly. He would not lead his horde into a snare from which they could not escape. The advance guard would presently return, and then no doubt—the wolf King would sound the attack.

Shungtowah had just rolled a white man's cigarette and was reaching for a coal from the fire when his eyes became riveted upon his dogs. They had stopped their stripping of the dried salmon. The Keokuk saw the hair raise on their backs and heard their cries stifle in their throats. He felt his own skin creep, for he knew these signs! Shungtowah became instantly alert. He darted into his camp tent and hastily grasped a rifle and an unopened box of steel-nosed shells.

He peered through the cottonwoods and where the glare of the camp-fire turned to black he saw four sets of pale-green burning eye-balls. He ripped the cartridge box open and loaded the rifle —the Eskimo permitted himself to gloat for a brief instant. He—Shungtowah—was a native

hunter. He read the message of those glowing eye-balls and a curse hissed through his teeth. He condemned to the bad spirits the white man who had debauched him from the golden heritage of his youth. He, a born hunter, to be so caught in his own trap! Shungtowah cursed Captain Hunter for having taught him to drink the brain-dulling hootch. "See what it had done! Deadened his natural hunting skill to this probability—wolves—wild, fierce, hungry wolves!"

He aimed true into one set of the pale globes. He pulled the trigger. A wild, indescribable yell followed the report. His three terrified dogs fled when the gun-shot recovered them from their fright.

Shungtowah threw what dry willows he had gathered, on the fire and estimated how long the ensuing blaze would stave off the inevitable onslaught. He had made no provision against this menace. He knew the strategic resourcefulness of the grey host that lurked but a short distance from him. He calculated his chances and grimly prepared to pass to his gods, as a warrior,—battling and fearless.

Above the crackle of the burning twigs he now heard the snapping of willow branches. He saw

the lights of countless gleaming eyes. The flaming mist was on him. It had not taken them long to ascertain his utter helplessness.

Suddenly as if at a given signal the deathly stillness was assailed by the most unearthly yell. The concerted shriek as of a million maniacs. It was the attack cry of the timber greys! Shungtowah's rifle cracked as fast as he could operate the ejector and pull the trigger. Everything that immediately surrounded him lived. So thick was the grey vengeance that no shot went amiss of a mark. But the fanatical lust for blood soon had the Keokuk brave across the border to his happy hunting grounds.

The wolves swarmed over him—tearing his furs from his body and in a hideous frenzy ripping strips of flesh from his bones. Soon they were snapping at each other and soon too they heeded another command from their mystic leader. The retreat. Their carnage was done. What there was to devour had been eaten. Even of themselves the grey beasts had partaken.

Five of their number was the toll of their eternal enemy, man. Five was the number of bullets the lone victim's rifle had spat into their ranks. As each wolf fell he was instantly pounced

upon by his brothers and drained of his life's warm blood.

Wraithlike and silently the pack withdrew to their stronghold in the deep timber, leaving behind them a dead, uncanny silence.

Then as if some sorrowful spirit still hovered over the scene, there arose in mournful cadence a call fraught with supplication and pain. Again and again the piteous appeal mounted to the infinite reaches above.

The vicious jaws of Shungtowah's trap had snapped on the foreleg of their victim. The call came from Kobuck. He had fought frantically to free himself of the steel grip on his foot. He was now crying for help.

As unerring as the Trinity wolves—the black dog had traced the scent to Shungtowah's trap. The lure of that irresistible odour was stronger than his opposition.

While hot on its trail he heard ahead of him a great chorus cry of his kin. "What a wonderful adventure—what a delightful caprice!"

Then suddenly he was jerked from his bounding stride and thrown violently to the crusted snow. He had stepped into something which

clutched his foot and hung on. It seemed it was trying to bite his foot off.

The pain of it was unbearable—he tore at it with his teeth and except for a covering which he ripped off it was cold and hard. It broke his tusks, it was so hard. Kobuck yelled for help—the thing would not let go. Surely his brothers could hear him—everything was so quiet now! Fortunately for him they did not return.

He struggled and tore, but the more he did so the deeper became the cut of the thing. At last he gave up and called.

At McCormick's, Agrook did not long stand inactive. He quickly set to getting the team in harness and strung out for action. But Till's heart sank like a plummet. His feet refused to move. Leaden and crushed, he sat in the sleigh and stupidly stared at the empty hitch alongside of Chief—Kobuck's wheel-mate. He felt that some great section of his being had gone from him. It left him weak and faint. But before long he began to take heart from Agrook, who had taken matters in hand.

The Indian seemed exultant,—here was his chance to show Till Price the colour of a Sela-

wick's hunting blood. He is keen for the promised chase. He has the dogs on a dead run. They move but too slowly to keep abreast of his ardour. He sings to them, "Fly to the spot on the trail where you all went crazy this morning. Agrook will read the answer then."

He infects his unhappy master with his assurance and energy. Till's wonderful trailing instinct comes to life. His thoughts too race ahead of the flying dogs.

Once more they have come to the spot where this morning they broke from the true trail. Till rushes to Grey Cloud, his famed leader. The rangy trailer is all aquiver with the fascinating spell of the scent which here once more has assailed his sense. He strains with all his power to be off on this weird trail. "Let me go," he tells his master.

"Give him his head, Agrook," Till calls to the boy. "The Cloud'll figure this thing out in his own way. I'll bet he's as nutty to go after Kobuck as are we ourselves."

Of the going ahead of the leader—nothing can be plainly seen. Both men have all their minds and hands can do to keep the sleigh on its runners. They plunge down gulleys and up snow

banks. They skirt icy overhanging ledges. Suddenly far ahead of them they hear a wild, delirious series of shrieks and yells. Panic seizes the dogs. They stop. Till and Agrook run to them and find them shuddering and filled with fear. The unearthly yells continue. They soar high on the clear Arctic stillness. Several sharp punctuations occur. "Rifle shots, Agrook," says Till.

"Wolves—a big pack," replies the Indian.

"My God—Kobuck's up there with them," Price moans.

"No-me," reassures the Indian boy. "Kobuck no stop near wolves. Go other way sure."

"Yes, but, Agrook, you know old Kutaro's story. Kobuck is a black wolf Prince. He'd never be afraid of the grey pack."

Gradually the dread sounds have died away and an oppressive silence ensues.

Once more the dogs and their drivers take heart and start ahead.

Then a call beginning low and rising to a high plaintive treble comes to them over the snows.

It is a familiar call to both Till and Agrook. To Grey Cloud it is even more familiar—he instantly recognises the tonal peculiarities of throat.

"It is a distress call from Kobuck, his own teammate—his master's idol!"

The leader gives the rescue note to his answering call and his team flies behind him.

Kobuck too has heard the onrushing team. He now cries more with delight than in pain—and then as in a dream he is aware of a great enveloping pair of arms around his neck. He is wildly licking the face pressed close to his own.

Agrook lights a seal-oil flambeau and comes to Till and Kobuck. He has much to do to keep the team-dogs back as they all want to pile on both Till and their mate. The Indian sees great tears running down Till's face. With shaking hands Price endeavours to release the foot of his pet. His strength fails him.

Agrook gives him the flambeau, which Till holds in a nervous grasp. It takes all the strength of the Indian's arms to relax the set of the trap jaws. He examines carefully the dog's foot—Kobuck licks the brown hand that surely is causing much pain in its search for broken bones.

"Arz-ri-gar," he says; which meant, "All O. K. Nothing broke." Then his face takes a murderous look in the light of the flambeau. Like a bronze vengeance he seems. "Shungtowah," he

hisses. "Me kill him!" The first thought of the primeval man. Price balanced the scale before God on high by breathing to Him a prayer of thanksgiving.

Agrook went to the sleigh and took from it a rifle. He then held the flambeau on a foot trail which he followed that led from the trap to the thicket a little further up the ravine.

Soon he returned.

"Ah-kah-oonah," he said.

"What is it, Agrook?"

"Shungtowah gone!"

"Gone?"

"Oong—dead!" said Agrook. "Yes, Shungtowah dead. Plenty tracks—wolves, five dead. Same bait for Kobuck—same bait for Shungtowah—same bait for wolves——"

Two weeks later Captain Hunter, in his snug cabin in Nome, was roused from his slumbers in the dead of a February night.

"Who's there?" he called.

"Open the door, Hunter,—it's Till Price."

"What do you want, Price?"

"It's a United States Deputy Marshal—Hunter. Open or I'll break in."

Hunter asked no questions after that—but lighted a candle and opened the door.

Price stepped into the cabin—Agrook at his heels.

"Hunter"—Price began. "I should take the law in my own hands and stand you up against the wall and shoot your cowardly carcass full of lead.

"But you are to live and suffer in the hands of the law. Now hold this door open wide while we bring in a package for you."

Hunter, speechless and pale, held the door as commanded.

Price and Agrook went out to their sleigh and lifted a long forbidding looking burden from it.

It was wrapped completely in grey wolf skins. They carried it into the cabin, and tenderly placed it on the floor. Hunter had staggered back against the wall.

"Hunter, bury your dead!" said Till.

"Here's Shungtowah, your unfortunate henchman. He's wrapped, what's left of him, in five prime wolf-skins."

"All caught in your trap set for *my black wolf-skin!*"

JUNO FROM IRISH HILL

X

JUNO FROM IRISH HILL

MURRAY SHEEHAN, his malamute bitch Juno, and his Christmas spree—the three together—had become an institution in Nome. For five years, during Yuletide week Murray had led a fighting jag from one dance-hall to another, and never without the wolf-dog trailer.

This Christmas—the sixth—Juno had five cubs to look after and could not go. Cubs I call them, and cubs they were—little roly-poly cusses, furred and marked, lynx-eyed and sharp-eared, for all the world like their kin, the timber grey. I should deem it a bit hard-hearted to go, as Murray did, leaving Juno, in need of his care and attention, to shift for herself and her young. But Murray was not proof against the siren call of the dull, shiny floor and the red liquor.

Besides, any remorseful pangs he may have felt at deserting Juno were submerged in the quantities of stewed prune and potato-mash "hootch" he had consumed the night before, during a grand jamboree of the inhabitants of Irish Hill. This home-made tonga of the pioneer Alaskans had caused brother to kill brother, and son to slay father; so what could be expected when only the feelings of a dog were to be considered?

Five times had Juno seen Murray's preparations for the big carouse—seen him distribute yellowbacks and gold about his belted person, sail forth from the cabin with a "tooraloora-loo," and swing down the trail, while she followed at his heels.

To-day as he left the cabin, headed Nomeward, she sensed his purpose and gave voice to her disapprobation by a whine of distress, whose supplication should have reached even Murray's dulled intellect. Then in her most seductive, plaintive manner she tried her animal persuasion on him, tried by the swish of her magnificent tail and her whinny cry to beg him not to go. She rubbed against his legs, with the five little rascals tumbling and scampering beside her, and nosed

her muzzle into his palm, pleading, as any sober-minded man would have known:

"Oh, man alive, will you go to Nome without me? You know you need me, and you know I can't go now!"

Yes, he needed her. For five years she had taken the lead in bad going, and piloted him, as only such as she could, with her mysterious, God-given instinct. It was a good sixty-mile trip, and seldom at the mid-winter season could it be made without encountering at least one of the terrifying Alaskan blizzards that burst, all unheralded, over the unsuspecting traveller—a whirling, tornado-like fury, blinding, icy, and deadly. . . . Now Murray was facing these dangers alone.

In town, wherever he trailed from one place to another, Juno unmistakably marked his presence by hers, sitting patiently outside the door, whether in furious, howling storm or peaceful, clear weather. Never did she venture within. These Northern cousins to the wolf are fresh-air dogs, and the sickening heat and nauseating closeness of confined air are unendurable to their lungs, used to the vigorous clarity of the Arctic open. Expectant and alert, she always waited without

for the familiar figure to appear, staggering and muttering along to the next joint. . . . Now Murray was starting for Nome with none to stand guard.

But the "hootch" pounding against Murray's temples made him deaf to the dog's entreaties. He was obsessed with the desire to hurry to Nome and take a boisterous share in the Christmas festal whirl—in those festivities whose dissoluteness and abandon had put this Arctic metropolis in a class by itself. And as Juno persisted in her pleadings, Murray's drunken impatience turned to rage and he angrily cut a vicious arc at her with his moccasined foot. It barely missed her.

"Back widjer!" he shouted. "How th' hell kin I git ter Nome wid th' boonch av yez thrailin' afther me? Git back, I say!"

In hurt bewilderment the dog huddled her young to her, and so they stood, with ears and eyes pointed at their master's disappearing form, until the turn of the trail had taken him from their sight. Juno's face wore a look of perplexity, as if she were trying to comprehend that astounding attempt of Murray's to kick her—his one true and devoted slave. Then, after a few moments, she turned and trotted back to the

cabin with the cubs that Murray had left her to care for, unaided.

For four nights a convenient fish cache and grub pile knew Juno's surreptitious presence. Her babes had to be fed. For four nights she thieved as only a wild, cunning creature can thieve for the hungry little stomachs of her whelps.

It was Owen Kerrigan's store of provisions upon which Juno concentrated her marauding tactics—and Owen her best friend, too, next to Murray. Kerrigan had not noticed the shrinkage in the dried salmon supply until his eye missed the slab of bacon which had hung from the ridge-pole of the tent that housed his winter's outfit.

"Phwat th' ——!! Who th' ——!! And can ye bate that now!" he exclaimed. Violation of one's neighbour's cache is as rare in this country as rowing in December.

Then the telltale tracks upon a frost-covered box of canned stuff gave him the key to the puzzle.

"Whirra!" he cried. "'Tis that Juno bitch av Murray's! Shure and didn't Oi know she'd make fer me food fer thim little divils av pups! Well, Juno, the Howly Saints fergive ye as Oi do. 'Tis a poor mither ye'd be if ye wudn't do

a little stalin' fer that prize boonch av fasht freighters yer raisin' this Christmas toime."

Next morning Owen was roused from his robe by the yelp of Juno outside his cabin door. Muttering a "God save us—phwat th' devil does this mane!" he slipped into his mackinaw and house moccasins and lifted the latch. He fairly yelled at the sight revealed to his sleepy eyes.

"Well, by the howly shade av the Lovely Dove! 'Tis Juno wid wan av the pups! Shure an' phwat is it, darlint?" he asked her. "Coom here to Owen; come on, asthore."

The bitch stood before the door with a cub suspended from her mouth. Furry, tense, and curled up like a kitten it hung, while with uplifted eyes she asked Owen if it could be left with him to be cared for. All entreaty she was, swishing her tail, and throwing her ears first up to the anxious angle, then back along her head, with a semaphore drop and rise. 'Twould have wheedled the heart out of a rock.

She would not drop the pup until she had the assuring word from the kind-hearted Irishman to whom she had brought it.

"Pwhat is it, darlint? An' do yez want me to take care av th' little feller fer yez?"

Instantly she recognised Kerrigan's friendliness and released the cub at his feet; then she jumped back and, assuming the couchant pose, wig-wagged an unmistakable "Thank you."

Then she trotted with her wolf gait over the rise to Murray's cabin, at intervals stopping to look back at Owen, who stood holding the little grey ball close to his breast.

Before the sun had made its swift ascent to midday, Owen Kerrigan had been created guardian of the entire litter. Each cub was brought to his threshold in the same fashion as the first—each contorted into a woolly ball that swung pendulum-like from the tender, strong jaws of the mother, who was working out a man's salvation.

To Owen it was as a sign from the saints.

"Shure," he mused, "an' do not she know that Oi'm auld and lonesome and care fer her masther as mooch as she do? An' do not Oi know that th' auld bitch has th' wan thing which th' koind God niver gave to mankoind—'tis the savin' av Murray she's plottin' now, and Mary bless her to wurrk it out in her own woild way. Oh, Murray," he breathed, "may th' auld bitch bring you back safe an' sound the way she has these foive years!"

Never had Nome known a wilder, fiercer Christmas week than this. Companionship Murray had in plenty, both men and women; but as the carousal waxed and the wherewithal to continue it waned, so waxed and waned the attention of a sycophantic horde of ne'er-do-wells who clung to him. Back and forth surged a crowd of gamblers, touts for the red-curtained establishments, drunks, and women, all intent upon the dissipation of Murray's thousands, which represented months of honest toil, months of wresting, bare-handed, from rock and crag their hidden treasure.

On New Year's Eve old John Barleycorn registered another complete victory in his million-paged book of records. Murray Sheehan had given him a six-day battle, the fury and wildness of which have gone down in the memory of eye-witnesses and participants for all their lives. Old antipathies had been rekindled; heads had been broken; leering harlots had smiled their treacherous nothings into Murray's befuddled eyes and stripped him clean of his wealth. Now he was down, completely conquered, sprawling wide-legged in an armchair behind the old drum-heater in the "Miner's Delight" saloon, his head hanging low on his chest.

Then out of the blackness that enveloped him came a saving presence.

It was a dog! A malamute dog, sired and bred from the wild timber-wolf of Northern Alaska; tamed, trained, and fed by Murray's own hand; taught the meaning of man-love for man-serving beast till the uncouth, wild blood in her had become cooled to gentleness, till the desire to kill and tear had been supplanted by docility and unfailing faith in her master.

For three days and nights Juno had tracked Murray Sheehan, sticking to him when even the meanest of Nome's derelicts would have none of him. Secure in the assurance that Owen Kerrigan would mother her young, as soon as the last cub was transferred she had begun the gliding panther trot across the silent waste, stopping only to clear her foot cushions of the ice that gathered between them and that served to quench her thirst.

When at last she reached Nome, she spied Murray leading a mad procession from "The Heart's Ease" to "The Northern"; saw him pass within before she could reach him, and took up her usual position before the door to wait for him. Then she carried her vigil from door to door, following her unheeding master, and had it not been for

the kindly act of Bob Atkins, who fetched her a morsel of dried salmon, she would have starved in her labour of fidelity.

Finally, on the eve of the New Year, when her watch before the door of "The Miner's Delight" had continued for six interminable hours, the beast heart in her escaped into the night in one long wail of indescribable sorrow. The forest call of her grandfathers rose above the hullabaloo of a mob gone mad in the wind-up of its year-end orgy.

And from somewhere in the hazy faraway Murray's stupefied brain received a faint call. One partly lucid cell spread its message to its neighbours, and he knew the summons to be the whinny bay of his pet Juno.

She was crying out to him to come home to her! To come home to Irish Hill!

Well, he would obey. He suddenly rose from his chair, squared his great shoulders as if in determined desperation, and ploughed an unsteady track for the open. He started to cover the sixty dangerous miles with no light but the glimmer of the Arctic stars and the pale glow of the great silent whiteness.

None heeded him. None now cared a tailor's curse where he was going, or why. His bones

were picked white and clean. So out he went into the night alone, and took the trail so many had taken before him, never to return.

The sight of him was food and drink to Juno. She sprang to him joyfully, and then, as he still paid her no heed, she fell back and stalked in his groggy tracks, content.

A dust snow was flying, cruel and bitter cold, as they took the trail into the heart of the mountains, where all things look alike at night and distance plays pranks even with a sober man's imagination. At the outskirts of Nome, Father Van was just coming out of the glow of his cabin on the way to midnight chapel service when Murray lunged past him, headed into the flying, drifting snow of the open trail.

The Jesuit called to him; he might as well have called to the wind. Juno answered with her distressed yelp and jumped in front of Murray, as if to turn him back to the shelter at hand. But the fiend had him in tow. No man could stop him in his determination to reach his own cabin and Juno. She had called to him to come home. Home he was going to her. On he plunged, the bitch taking the lead and intuitively guiding him in the right direction. A sixth sense impelled the

man to follow her—he did not know that the dog was with him. Almost frenzied, Juno tried to turn him back. She jumped at his face, snapped at his hands, ran circles around him in a wild endeavour to make him understand.

Suddenly a "chinook" blew out of the south, and the dry, chilly snow changed to a pelting blizzard of blinding, heavy flakes. Murray staggered on, oblivious to the heavy packing of the trail. When midway between Nome and the Dexter divide, his legs collapsed and he crumpled up in the soft, wet snow, unconscious. Frantically, Juno tugged at his clothes; she licked his face and uncovered hands; nuzzled her nose into his beard, whimpering her mother signs to him without avail. The snow fell in sheets, and Murray was soon transformed into a pearly mound except where the dog kept his face and hands clear with her tongue.

Then she resorted to the weird wolf-call of her kind, a call of distress and appeal, in the hope that it might be heard and understood by some chance soul within the far-reaching radius of its power. She began it low, a deep, guttural note which gradually rose to the hysteric staccato of a shrill, hyena-like shriek.

There was no answer.

Again she repeated her cry for help. None came. Then, quivering with excitement, she once more lapped the snow from Murray's face and hands and, with a whimpering croon of farewell, struck out over the snow in a bee-line for Nome—a mystic streak of grey through the thick white.

Father Van had returned from service, his mind perturbed and his heart heavy. The spectre-like picture of the lurching, reeling figure and the lone malamute hitting the trail on such a night filled him with a haunting disquietude. Somewhere out in the fury of the wild chinook they were fighting a grim battle with death. Sinking to his knees, he prayed that the Great Father of the North would guide the two wanderers into safety.

While still kneeling, his attention was fearfully arrested by a wail outside the cabin, a wail that rose high and piercing above the whistle of the chinook. It was immediately followed by a pounding and scratching on his storm door, which instantly brought him to his feet. Trembling, he advanced to open the door, while the pounding and scratching continued. The wailing was

incessant, shrill and harrowing, and the priest's heart quaked with a fear such as he had felt once years before when he had heard the cries of wolves in pack on his trail. But open he must—no one, whether man or beast, ever appealed at his door in vain.

There stood the dog he had seen racing into the storm as he was about to enter the chapel. Mute and quivering, Juno raised her eyes to him—eyes glowing in the light from the cabin like twin smouldering rubies. The look shot her message straight into his heart.

Her master was out there in the blizzard! He needed immediate help!

She gave a backward spring from the door, toward the Dexter divide, and came back again to the standing attitude as the Jesuit had found her upon opening the door. It was all too clear to him. Yes, the dog's master was out in the pitiless drift, helpless, undone, and *she* was here to guide help to him. Father Van's duty was plain. The raging, tearing blindness of the chinook, instead of making him hesitate, was but added incentive for haste. Fortunately, there was little danger of Murray's freezing to death, for when this blast comes out of the bowels of

the sub-Arctic laterals, the blanket of snow which spreads over the country has a merciful warmth. But there *was* grave danger, the priest knew, that an overtaken traveller might succumb to the stifling weight of the snow covering.

Instantly he formulated a plan of rescue, and set about carrying it out. He called his Indian boy, Sub-choo-ahk, and ordered the sleigh and dogs brought at once.

"*Ong, wong-ah-tu-si-ruck!*"—the exclamation showing the boy's understanding of the need for swift action, was his sole reply. Alert and agile, the Indian bounded to the kennels, and before many minutes the jingle of harness bells announced a spanking seven-dog team of the swiftest malamutes on the peninsula. They were strung out Siwash fashion, and attached to them was a long, low, rakish basket-sleigh constructed for speed. Equipped with robes, a medicine chest, a flask, and a shovel, Father Van jumped into the sleigh; and Sub-choo-ahk, gripping the handle-bars, snapped the command which whirred the seven after Juno, speeding on ahead as their pilot.

Not a track, not a trail, not a sign, was there to indicate that man or animal had ever cut a

path over that section of the going. The chinook was doing its work well. The deep, heavily packed snow, the impenetrable drift, the ridges that flanked every hummock, had literally to be ploughed through. Father Van, divested of his riding furs, was soon out in the running, doing his share in the conquest of the storm.

Straight as the flight of a rifle-ball the dog guided them on, outrunning them at times and doubling on herself in her frantic anxiety to reach her goal. Occasionally the priest and the Indian caught a glimpse of her racing back to the leader of the team, as if to offer some word of assurance, to buoy him up by pacing alongside for a time. Then she would catapult away again into the thick curtain of snow that shut her from their sight.

Suddenly the sleigh pitched into the entire pack of dogs, who had rushed pell-mell upon Juno, as she dug frantically into a mound of snow. Sub-choo-ahk darted ahead and dragged the team away from her. Directly Father Van was at her side, digging excitedly with the shovel he had brought for this purpose. Presently Juno, still pawing and sniffing, began a plaintive, tremulous cry, as if the suspense were beyond endurance. And

then, when at last her claws touched her master's body, she broke out in a wild, ringing peal of delight.

Father Van and Sub-choo-ahk lifted the inert form into the warmth of the sleigh robes, and then the Jesuit bared Murray's breast and placed his ear over the heart. A faint beating assured him that the man still lived. He applied the flask to the close-clenched teeth, which had to be pried apart to admit the draft that now was a powerful agent of restoration. A quickened pulse immediately answered.

Juno's joy knew no bounds. She ran from Murray to Father Van, licking her master's face and hands, and snuggling her nose into the priest's face, as if to assure him of her gratitude.

Then came the race back to shelter, into the very onslaught of the blinding storm. But the seven dogs needed no urging from the Indian in covering the distance to the town, and Juno kept up her tireless stride at the side of the sleigh, not a foot away from Murray's head.

She had saved him.

For two weeks the Holy Sisters of Shelter Hospital nursed and watched over Murray as only

these heroines of the wilderness can. Gently, persistently, faithfully, they fanned the light of his life, which flickered feebly at times, back to a healthy glow, and they were aided, they thought, by the constant presence of the grey wolf-dog, whose fidelity never wavered.

Always, when Murray muttered in delirium, he called her name. Always she tried by her answering call to make him realise that she was by his side. Often she would run her head up under his palm, and so take his unconscious caress. Later, when the delirium had passed, she would sit upright for hours where his hand could reach her head.

Murray's first visitor was Owen Kerrigan, and with him entered, each with its particular single-action rush, Juno's five pups. Oh, the transport of Juno as she herself rushed to stop the avalanche of her brood! And the ecstasy of the roly-polies as they cavorted and frolicked about her! And the light of joy on the face of the sick man!

"Ah, Murray, me bye, Oi've been waitin' since day befoor yisterday to see yez," said Kerrigan. "Howly Mither, I'm plazed to see th' ould light in yer eye! Th' pups and Oi have shlept in the same bunk ever since the day that Juno brought

thim over to me shack on th' hill. But th' little divils have ate me outer fish, bacon, an' roice, so th' whole boonch av us came to town to get a fresh supply; and thin, whin ye're able, we'll all go back to Oirish Hill, where th' byes is waitin' to give ye a grand raciption upon yer safe return, which by the same token is nothin' but th' gorgeous wake we had prepared fer ye in th' evint that ye needed a good sind-off. Murray, do ye know that th' auld bitch saved yer loife?"

Murray knew it. Ever since the return of reason, the gently spoken words of Father Van, as he narrated the tremendous part Juno played in the New Year's Eve rescue, had been burned and seared on his heart. And now as he lay here, with his hand in that of his old friend and his eyes resting affectionately upon the mother-dog tending her cubs, two great tears rolled down his cheeks.

Seven years have passed since Juno saved her master. In that time the story has grown to be an epic in the hearts of the pioneer inhabitants, of the new Arctic empire. To this day, when the midsummer sun warms the board sidewalk of the city of Nome, tenderfoot and "sour-dough" alike

gingerly step over Juno, or deliberately walk around her, as she stretches her old, grey-furred length across the boards. Here she dreams the whole day long, basking in the love of the big-hearted country where her kind is placed upon a pedestal, and where hams, bacon, and nice, juicy salmon of adoration are brought to her daily.

From that day to this, liquor has not passed Murray Sheehan's lips. He has grown to be the biggest man morally, mentally, financially—in fact, every way—in all Alaska.

The "fasht freighters," as Owen Kerrigan called the pups when Juno was robbing his cache for them, are each year entered in the all-Alaskan sweepstakes. Each year they return with the wreath of victory and place it at the feet of their lord and master—Murray Sheehan.

"Shure and why shouldn't they be the shwiftest darlints in the world?" Murray says with tender pride. "Do not they come out of the unbeaten record-holder of Alaska, the one dog aloive that outsprinted the divil himself? The divil who chased me for foive solid years, but, thanks be to God, never caught me! 'Tis Juno, I mane."

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This remarkable book is a record of the author's own amazing experiences. This big, brawny world rover, who has been acquainted with alcohol from boyhood, comes out boldly against John Barleycorn. It is a string of exciting adventures, yet it forcefully conveys an unforgetable idea and makes a typical Jack London book.

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The story opens in the city slums where Billy Roberts, teamster and ex-prize fighter, and Saxon Brown, laundry worker, meet and love and marry. They tramp from one end of California to the other, and in the Valley of the Moon find the farm paradise that is to be their salvation.

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